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SKETCHES FROM NORMANDY

COLONIAL EDITION

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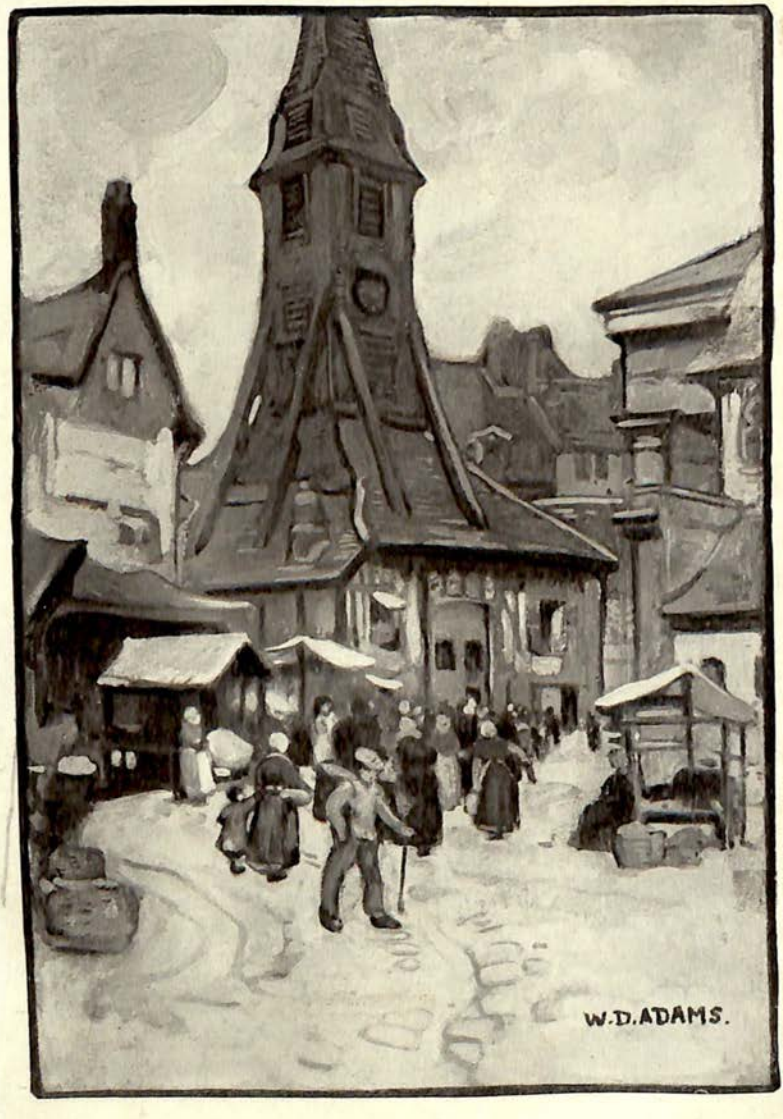
NOTE—*The author and publisher of this volume acknowledge, with thanks, the kindly permission accorded to them by the proprietors of the* Westminster Gazette *and the* Pall Mall Gazette *to reprint in book form such of these* Sketches from Normandy *that originally appeared in those journals—in most instances over the signature of "Tom Denison."*

PREFACE

The author earnestly trusts that the readers of these Sketches from Normandy *will accept his solemn assurances that he has spared no time, or toil, or midnight oil to redeem himself from the charge so often made (and justly so) of being careless and shockingly incorrect in his grammar. If he has again failed, he can only plead, as an excuse, that he submitted the MSS. in turn to three clergymen, one barrister and a lady novelist. They all returned them with such condemnatory remarks that he has thrown himself upon the mercy of his publisher's "reader," and has asked him to do his best. If that gentleman refuses, he should be dismissed without a character.*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SKETCHES FROM NORMANDY

B240

By

LOUIS BECKE

Author of

"Notes from my South Sea Log," "By Reef and Palm," etc.

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ac.

Frontispiece by W. DACRES ADAMS

COLONIAL EDITION

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LONDON

T. WERNER LAURIE

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Sketches from Normandy

I

INTRODUCTION

One still, summer afternoon my two youngest children and myself—with the dog—went for a stroll along the North Wall, Dublin—"to look at the ships." We stopped at every steamer and spelled out the name on the stern, till we came to the stately *Cambria*, which had brought us from England a year before.

"Hallo, little girls," cried a well-remembered voice, "come on board and have some tea with me," and there, standing in the doorway of his deck cabin, was red-faced, white-moustached Captain P——, an old friend of mine with whom I had crossed and re-crossed the Irish Channel a score of times, and "swapped yarns" of those old days in Australian seas when he was chief officer of a Sydney-China steamer and

I was earning a moderately honest living as supercargo of the South Sea trading brig *Vision*.

So on board we went, and Mrs Hogan, the fat, motherly and bubbling-voiced stewardess, brought us tea. Then whilst P—— and I sat and smoked after our tea, the children ran a race round and round the spotless upper deck. Presently back they came, flushed and panting.

"We have been right up on the high front part of the ship where the anchors an' whizzy things are, *an'*, do you know, there is a steamer right in front of us an' her name is the *Bayard*, an' she, oh, she is a big fat steamer, an' under her name is 'St Malo' an' we saw such a nice man with a black moustache as long as Captain P——'s and he laughed at us and said 'Bon jour, mesdemoiselles,' an' he simply *can't* talk English an' we think he's French an' he has a white shirt with blue stripes."

P—— laughed as the speaker stopped for want of breath, and said,—

"She is a French boat, taking over horses—cavalry remounts. I know the skipper. He's a jolly little chap. You should go on board and see those horses."

Now, although a sea-faring man, horses have always had an attraction for me. I am always

willing to try and ride any horse, and despise the British conventional idea that you must always mount on the near side. If you are in a hurry the other side is just as good; but horses have been so long accustomed to their riders' slavish adherence to the antiquated practice of mounting from one side only that they become cross and snort and quiver and put on silly airs when anyone puts his foot in the stirrup on the other side. One day when I and Doolan, the cablegram man, were snipe-shooting in a squashy swamp in County Louth, we saw a bull calf tethered in a field near by, and I told Doolan that any sailor man could ride a calf, though a British cavalry man couldn't. He said he would like to see me do it. I did it, but the long chain which was attached to the beast somehow got twisted round the legs of Doolan; and also the rural postman, who happened to be watching the scene. The calf, which was a rough, ill-mannered, coarse beast, rushed violently down into the swamp and then stopped so suddenly that I was disgusted, and somewhat hastily quitting his back waded through the mud to untie the silly men who had got in the way and had been dragged feet first for a couple of hundred yards over the

bumpy, soddened ground. But I am getting away from my subject.

We went on board the *Bayard*, and the man with the striped jersey, who was the second mate, was very nice to us, and showed us the horses. Then the captain came along and the whole four of us sat down on the bridge and talked as we watched the steamers and tugs churning up the soupy Liffey.

Presently an inspiration came to one of the children. Turning to me she inquired, "Is the water out in the sea as smooth and flat as it is here?"

"Yes, I daresay it is. But why do you ask?"

"Because I think we ought to go to France in this steamer. I could help to feed the horses. It will be lovely."

The idea somehow caught hold of me, and in a few minutes I was talking to the captain about his passenger accommodation, date of departure for St Malo, etc.

Now, everything was not so easy as I thought it would be. The captain was quite willing to take passengers, but—there is always a "but"—there were certain objections to his taking them on that particular trip of the *Bayard* (which wasn't her name, but that doesn't matter). However,

after seeing the agent, with the captain, these objections were satisfactorily removed—what they were is also of no consequence—and I was told I might come on board with my family, if I did so without undue ostentation and unaccompanied by a brass band.

The moment the interview was over, the children and I were on a car, driving "most furious" to our hotel. Bursting in upon the other members of the family, we noisily desired them to pack up, as we were all going to France for a fortnight and had to be on board the steamer at 8 p.m. (Alarums and Excursions.)

That was a delightful trip from Dublin, round by the Land's End to St Malo. As we were the only passengers on board except a French official (who was a charming fellow), and some men in attendance on the horses, we did pretty much as we liked, dressed as we liked and slept and ate in the most energetic manner.

Three days at St Malo, five at Dinan, and a week at Dinard, and our fortnight was over and gone. Then one morning I saw a small steamer by the quay with a notice board in her fore-rigging, which stated that she was leaving at noon next day for Tréguier, Côtes du Nord. So we went to Tréguier, and on by slow train

to the quaint old city of Honfleur, asleep by the sea, then across the Seine to Le Hâvre and from thence to St Jouin de Bruneval and Etretat, and I forget how many other quiet little French towns. The fortnight expanded into months and the months into years, until now three years have all but gone and yet our fortnight's trip hasn't come to an end. When it will we cannot tell—so much depends upon the dog. To take him to England to undergo six months' supervision by the myrmidons of the British Board of Agriculture is too awful a thing for the children to contemplate with calmness, and so we are waiting for a war, or an earthquake, or some kind of cataclysm which will afford an opening next year for getting the dog across in a quiet, unobtrusive fashion. Meanwhile we are well content.

And then we often have young Jimmy Potter with us—at least twice a year. He tracks us down like a sleuth-hound—and we like it.

II

POUR LA CHASSE:

A "SHOOT" IN FRANCE

II

POUR LA CHASSE.

A "SHOOT" IN FRANCE

WHEN the hot days of July came, we tired of the close house and the stuffy little garden, surrounded by a high wall. There was nothing to do all day but stare from the windows out upon the steaming, oily Seine and watch the colliers from Cardiff, the timber boats from the Baltic and the oil boats from Baku pounding their way up the river. Past smoky, stodgy Hâvre with its lines of docks and belching factory chimneys and sleepy old Honfleur nestling in the pine woods of Calvados, they go to Rouen, to discharge their cargoes, and then return a few days later, with their hoarse syrens bellowing as if the ships were in mortal pain from some internal disease.

We stood it for a week, and then we closed the house for a month and went off to a quiet farmhouse *pension* in Manche, where for a month we lazed away existence, eating fruit

and sleeping and making ourselves happy. The peasantry round about were kindly, hospitable folk, and the children—*and* the dog—got along splendidly with them. They were allowed to run in and out of the quaint old farmhouses, through the fields and rich orchards, with the large-eyed, shy and gentle children. The women folk gave them great bunches of glorious roses and showed them their old lace work and the other household treasures so dear to the hearts of the Normandy and Brittany country-folk. They made much of *les petites demoiselles Anglaises*, whose French was of a marvellous kind—such a wonderful polyglot had never been spoken before.

I had a room in the farmhouse, which I called my study, because I pretended to work there. Its floor was of time-worn, polished oak, so, too, was the furniture. Everything was spotlessly sweet and clean—so sweet and clean that when the farmer's wife saw my highly polished cuspidor, placed on its own especial coir rug, she beamed at me with effusive appreciation. It was easy to see, she said, that *monsieur*, who was such a great smoker, meant to protect the old oak floor. Now, a year before, a German gentleman, who

was an artist, had wrung her heart by his shocking disregard of her floor. He, of course, meant no harm, but when he was smoking, he did not think of the beautiful floor—he treated it as if it were the common, sanded floor of a *café debit.*

And so, somewhat to my later regret, I won Madame's heart. She was a cheery, good-hearted soul, but worried me considerably by frequently coming into my study, sitting down and urging me to take my writing out into the orchard. She, like our servant Céline, said that I worked too hard.

"Yes, Madame," I would say, "and when once we are dead, we are a long time dead. Is it not so?"

Then I would offer her a *petit verre* of old Jamaica rum. She would blushingly observe that I was very kind, and that she could not refuse my hospitality—never before had she tasted such *rhum* as mine; it must certainly be an excellent tonic, on account of its great age. Then she would tell me stories about her family connections, and her uncle, the Bishop, who had been to England when he was a young man and had fallen in love with a girl in a stationer's shop in Liverpool, and wanted to leave the

Church and marry her, but how a *conseil de famille* rose to the occasion and saved a scandal, etc.

. . . . . .

One day Madame's heavy sixteen-stone footstep sounded on the stairs. She stopped at my study door to gasp a little, then knocked and entered, her always florid but still pretty face more florid than usual, and her beady black eyes glittering with pleasurable excitement. She sat down with a thump that shook the house, and then triumphantly held up a telegram.

"Ah," I said sympathisingly, "Monsieur Bouget has sold the sucking pigs at Saint Brieuc for thirty francs each—"

"*Mais, non, m'sieur.* I trouble not about the pigs. It is more important and pleasurable; it is from my nephews, Maurice and Charles. They come here to-morrow"—here she smiled fatuously—"and will remain a week—*pour la chasse.*"

A dull chill fell upon me and froze me into silence, for the suddenness of the thing was too much for me for a few minutes. (Two years before I had seen a French "sportsman" at Dinard shooting sparrows from his breakfast-

room window as they tripped over the snow-covered lawn.) So I could only say that I hoped Messieurs Maurice and Charles would have good sport. Madame beamed, and said they certainly would — they were both "great bird hunters," and had the most beautiful appliances for la chasse—*les fusils magnifiques!* That of Maurice cost forty-five francs, and with it he had one day at Tréguier killed sixteen seagulls! Ah, he was *très adroit*, was Maurice, although but twenty-two years.

"It was in this way, monsieur—it was last year. The *torpilleurs* in the Bay of Douarnanez had killed many porpoises which were destroying the sardine nets. Two porpoises were washed on shore, ten metres apart. In some days they began to smell, and the seagulls came to eat the bad flesh. Maurice crept down and lay beside that one which was lying highest up on the shingle, and aimed at the birds feeding on the other fish, *comme ça*—across its back. Then bang, bang, and four of them are dead! Then again and again until sixteen are his, and there are no more cartridges for the brave fellow to shoot. Ah, you will love Maurice — and Charles too. So handsome are they. *Après le*

diner every night they will come to you and talk."

("Not if I know it," I said to myself.)

I must mention that for some few days past a covey of partridges had been seen, it was alleged, in the vicinity, and great numbers of "sportsmen" had come into the district with dogs to slay the birds, and all day long the sound of guns could be heard in the fields and about the apple orchards. It was stated in the local paper that MM. Roget and Sescau in one day had successfully killed "*une grande perdrix, deux lapins, et cinq canards sauvages.*" Next day, however, as these two sportsmen were seated outside the Café du Cheval Blanc, they were assailed by two furious peasant women, who demanded the value of their ducks, and their demands were backed up by an excited following of vociferous men armed with sticks.

. . . . . .

Messieurs Maurice and Charles arrived for *déjeuner*, and for an hour wild clamour and rejoicing ensued. I was requested to look at the dogs. One was a mongrel dachshund about a yard along, and apparently built in badly connected sections; the other was much the inferior

animal—a sort of a cross between an Indian pariah dog and a low grade pug. Both had sore eyes and smelt offensively when they were brought into the *salle-à-manger* to be caressed by the admiring relatives of Maurice and Charles. Maurice was the elder of the two, and somewhat reserved as becomes a mighty hunter; Charles was voluble, with bright red lips, staring blue eyes, and fragmentary premonitions of a beard growing in isolated tufts on a chin shaped like a long radish.

During lunch, their little cousin Félicie piped out to Maurice that for a week past there had been four blackbirds flying in and out of the branches of the big Portuguese laurel in the garden. Charles, who was eating bread and jam, uttered an exclamation of joy, and at once left the table. Maurice, the more practised sporstman, smiled, and rose languidly.

"*Ma petite*, thou shalt eat a *merle* for thy dinner," he said loftily.

"And I should like a *grive*," said Hortense (aged eighteen). "There are plenty in the garden of old Mme. Debleds. She feeds them. And last June there were two *coucous* there—larger than the one Charles killed when he and

Jacques Huc and his father shot the same *hibou* in one night."

"Have no fear, Hortense. Thou shalt have more than one *grive* before I return."

Then he too left to don his sporting rig.

They came downstairs, arrayed in cheap Parisian "Johnny-reach-me-down" shooting costumes, that gave one a pain in the eye to behold. Their game bags were fringed with a sort of macramé leather-work stained green and yellow respectively, and their guns, which I was asked to examine, made me shudder. They were dear at fifteen shillings each, though a New Guinea nigger might have given five dollars' worth of pumpkins and bananas for one, when new.

Then, the sward under the big Portuguese laurel tree having been "well ground-baited" with breadcrumbs by Madame and Hortense, the sportsmen, after much voluble discussion as to the plan of attack, bravely stepped out, approaching the tree from opposite sides. The family, some on fences, some on the coping of the garden wall, anxiously awaited; Edouard, the house-boy, held the parodies of dogs in a leash, though both were lying down asleep.

(My dog "Russ" had gone off somewhere,

and could not be found. He knew something about French "gunners.")

Ten anxious minutes passed in a deathlike silence, broken only by Madame's wheezy whispers to my daughter that Maurice had formed a sort of plan of campaign, and all four birds might fall. Maurice was *très, très adroit* in the *chasse.*

"Bang, bang, bang, bang," and two terrified blackbirds flew past the house as a cry of triumph burst forth from M. Charles, and the whole family tore up to the laurel tree.

Maurice—who never gets excited—was calmly reloading his gun, pretending to be oblivious of the cries of admiration that greeted him. Charles was bounding towards the family with the remains of two blackbirds held up.

"Viola, Félicie! Viola, Hortense! We took them all together, but can only find two —the others, however, are wounded, and cannot escape. Hasten with the dogs, Edouard."

. . . . . .

Before the two gunners left for Paris the proud Maurice permitted me to make the following extract from his livre de chasse. (I had shown him a copy of the *Field*, at the bloated proportions of which he evinced some

surprise, and urged him to send his record to that paper. He shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps, *monsieur*, perhaps; but I am a busy man in Paris—and I have no desire to glorify myself. Still, I will consider.")

Samedi.—4 *merles*, 2 *n'ont pas été trouvés, ou sont perdus*, 3 *grives*, 1 *rouge-gorge.*

Dimanche.—1 *rouge-gorge*, 1 *merle.*

Lundi.—*Rien—de la pluie.*

Mardi.—7 *passereaux et* 1 *grive.*

Mercredi.—4 *merles*, 1 *alouette*, 19 *passereaux.*

Jeudi.—*Rien aujourd'hui. Le pauvre "Turco" est mort.*

Vendredi (*La Hève*).—10 *mouettes et un oiseau gris étranger* (*peut-etre bécassine Anglaise*).

Samedi.—4 *fauvettes d'hiver.*

"Turco" was the dachshund, which Monsieur Charles had mistaken for a hare, as the lengthy animal was waddling through some gorse.

. . . . . .

Owls, sparrows, cuckoos, painted finches, martins, blackbirds, thrushes, and even swallows (when in summer they show their sweet heads out of their mud nests under the eaves of a barn) are regarded as "game" by the French cockney.

And the shame of it to the songbird-loving Englishman (barring the creature who devours larks) is that the average French person eats the poor creatures with as much relish as if they were partridges or pheasants.

Now, Maurice and Charles were not at all bad youths. They really believed themselves to be "sportsmen," and had no idea of the absurd appearance they presented to the average Briton, and when I was describing their week's "shoot," to a very dear French friend of mine—a medical man, who is an ardent duck-shooter and spends many a bitter winter morn on the Seine in his punt—he laughed and said it would be unkind of me to write about them. Then he added seriously,—

"But it is shocking, truly shocking and deplorable, this slaughter of songbirds in France. The thrush and the blackbird, which once filled even the town gardens with their sweet songs, are now rare birds in the north of France, and will soon be extinct. And I will tell you what I saw at Trouville last year. Some young man, standing on the pier, had shot at, and wounded, a puffin. For quite an hour, a boat-load of other 'sportsmen' chased

it, firing at it the moment it showed its head above the water. Certainly, they must have fired fifty or sixty times at it before it was killed, and triumphantly brought on shore."

III

MY FRIEND POTTER

III

MY FRIEND POTTER

I FIRST met Potter at the house of a mutual friend in Paris nearly three years ago, and we at once became friends. His bright, deeply-bronzed face, his merry, laughter-filled eyes, and his frank, genial manner inspired confidence from the first, and before we parted that evening he promised to come and call on me in my apartments in Rouen. He was cycling there from Paris, and was going on to Etretat to spend a week with some English friends. My host's wife, as I bade her good-night, said,—

"I'm glad that you have met Jimmy and like him. Ted and I have a real affection for him. But, I must warn you—he's the incarnation of the spirit of mischief. Always expect something to happen when you see him deep in thought."

A day or two later, Potter arrived at Rouen, and stayed with us for a couple of days, and the

children straightway fell in love with him. He insisted on taking them out for drives and bringing them home in a much be-rumpled but gloriously happy condition. When he left it was with a promise to spend a week with us in a little village among the pine-woods of St Gatien in Calvados, and he and I were to make fishing trips along the coast.

A few months after our first meeting we had a third visit from him, and from that time forward he has figured largely in the family records. To the children he is a mine of joy, to the dog a beneficent but injudicious friend, and everyone calls him "Jimmy." Sometimes, it is true, my wife and eldest daughter resent his unceremonious way of bursting into my study and slapping me on the back, when I am in the middle of writing a deeply instructive article on the undoubted fact of turtles (sea turtles—not turtle doves) originally being possessed of the arboreal instinct in a modified form—or something similar.

"At it again!" Potter will cry, as, after thumping me on the back, and making the ashes and burning tobacco jump out of my pipe on to my blotting-pad, he flings himself into an armchair and whistles to the dog to

spring on to his knees and lick his face. "I say, why can't you take a spell off and come out? What are you writin' now? Something about the cockle of a sperm whale's tail or one of those South Sea yarns about the brown girls with the meagre toilettes? By Jove, my aunt nearly had a fit when I lent her *The Cruel Cruise of the "Canahooka" Collier.* She says it's a most horrid, immoral book, and that you and your publisher ought to be ashamed of yourselves. She did, really. And she said the other day, when I was quoting your remark that Mary Kingsley was a most lovable woman, that she was not a true Kingsley to write such Abominable Things about missionaries. Lord! if the capital A and T had been made of wood there would have been the material for a three-storied house in them."

"*Mr* Potter," my wife remarks, "*will* you *please* be good enough to go away, and not return till lunch."

"Oh, all right. Very sorry. I'll clear. Where are the kids?"

"*Jimmy!* Please do not say 'kids.' You know it annoys me—and I *won't* have you using the expression. Please understand—*I will not have it.*"

Jimmy apologises, with such abject humility, that my wife and daughter ask him to sit quiet and look at the latest papers, and not take the children out before lunch.

Now, I am getting back to the first fully written record of James Potter's doings.

. . . . . .

Potter is seventeen years of age, and is studying languages—French especially. His parents are both dead, and Potter's aunt, who lives in England, has great hopes that the young villain will take to the Church, and become a bishop, or some other ecclesiastical dignitary with black gaiters. Potter grins. "Diplomatic Service for Me. That's why I stick to languages. I like 'em. My dad was a tip-top man at Oriental languages—Arabic, Pushtoo, Chinese, and the whole string, but he never got a show like Kitchener. He was in the Indian Marine, and said he might as well have been in—"

"Stop that, Potter. Boys should not use bad language."

"I'm not using it. I'm merely repeating in a reflex manner, as it were, my father's opinions on the inadvisability of anyone without social influence and plenty of 'oof' attempting to achieve—"

"Potter, my boy, you are clearly destined for diplomacy. You have the gift of involved language, abnormal cheek, and—"

He interrupted me by shouting out something in French to two lads who were cycling past us on the Boulevard. They were former fellow-students of his, and at once stopped—as also did nearly everyone else who was passing—to listen to Potter, who ended up with a peal of derisive laughter, one of the youths angrily shaking his fist at him as he rode off.

"What was that frightful slang you used?" I asked.

"Oh, you see there's a football team coming over here from Eastbourne to play these French chaps, and I told those two jokers that our coves were going to send all the French team into the Hospice Générale for a month, and when they come out they'll be so altered that their own mothers won't know 'em, and crippled for life into the bargain."

"You young idiot. Why don't you try and help on *l'entente*—"

IV

"COMITAS INTER GENTES"

IV

"COMITAS INTER GENTES"

It is our duty—our bounden duty—to help along *l'entente cordiale* as much as possible. As one of the millions of insignificant units of the British Empire, I, personally, do my humble best; and now is the time for those of us who live in France to endeavour, by many little acts of self-sacrifice (which *I* continually practise) to make our French neighbours love us more and more. We have great chances, for France is not now standing Russia free drinks to any great extent, and has turned her soft, peachy-hued cheek to us to kiss. Let us kiss it, and she will do the same good thing to us.

But we Britons must, as I have ventured to observe, be a little more unbending, a little more gracious, tone down our national brusqueness, and doff our hats to the *chiffonnier* who carries away our dust boxes on week days, and

takes off his hat to us when we meet him and "madame" doing their Sunday afternoon promenade. Politeness goes a long way, costs nothing, is easy to exercise, and never does one any harm, even when extended to the coalman. Only a few days ago our charwoman—who is not a Venus—brought her infant son to the house, and planted him in the garden, whilst she toiled and moiled for four hours at twenty-five centimes per hour. The infant made havoc of my garden. But I remembered *l'entente cordiale!* I—after a few words breathed softly to myself—rose sublimely above racial prejudices, and returned good for unintentionally-committed evil. Leading the tender culprit into the kitchen by its clammy hand, I gave it half a potful of jam, a spoon, and three sous. ALL THIS *pour l'entente cordiale.*

As I write, there is before me on my study table a huge bunch of white daffodils. The charwoman sent them. To pick them her husband walked three miles—and three miles back—this morning. He presented them to me as only a Frenchman can present such a simple, but pleasing gift. We had a *petit verre* together, shook hands, and I felt that I was the gainer. Anyway those daffodils made me feel

good, and I am doing my level best to help along the nations' friendship.

But, as long as we—my family and I—are afflicted with the friendship and unsought and unholy confidences of young Potter, I shall never be free from the haunting fear that something awful will happen to us some day and that we shall have to leave the country hurriedly. My friendship with him has caused me many bitter moments, for he is always saying or doing awful things, for which, somehow, *I* am blamed. He has a unique knowledge of French—especially the slang of fishermen, fisherwomen, porters, and *cochers,* and is hail-fellow-well-met with everyone for miles around, from the colonel commanding the district to the son of the man who runs the merry-go-round in Honfleur on Sundays. And when Potter comes to me and asks me to "knock off scribbling and come and have a walk," I am fool enough to go.

Last week we—with my dog—went on a walking tour, and found ourselves on Sunday at a tiny village named Mentheville. The local café was filled with black-bloused, black-capped farmers, and in ten minutes Potter was on extremely friendly terms with them. They were simple-minded, honest, hospitable souls, and

when I requested the patron to bring a bottle of brandy for their benefit they extended their friendship to me.

And then Potter began to talk.

One old fellow had been poring over a three days' old *Matin*, and reading it aloud when we first entered—and Potter, hearing him say something about the removal of the remains of *l'amiral Paul Jones* from Paris to America, told them a marvellous story of the deceased gentleman's exploits—speaking the most curious French I have ever heard—the French of Mentheville and its vicinity. Paul Jones, he informed them, had sunk three British men-of-war in one night by diving under their bottoms and boring holes into them with an auger.

"*Ah, c'était un homme courageux!*" murmured the audience.

Then *l'amiral Jones* could easily, Potter added, have taken London but wouldn't, as he had an English sweetheart there who worked in a *blanchisserie* and begged him not to do it.

"*Ah, le bon garçon!*"

Then Potter produced a late London paper and asked the company if they would like him to read something of the grand *fêtes* at Brest.

"*Oui, oui, m'sieu, nous l'entendrons avec beaucoup de plaisir.*"

And Potter was looked at approvingly, and whispered complimentary remarks were made upon his appearance, his *bonhomie*, and his fluent command of *la langue*.

"Potter," I said, "for Heaven's sake do be careful and not tell these honest people any more outrageous falsehoods. Try and bear in mind our duty to help to preserve *l'entente*."

"That's just what I *am* doing. Now this Brest affair as reported in the London Press don't go half far enough. It's cold, rotten cold, and guarded, so to speak—no warmth, no outburst of joy. You journalistic fellows never seem to know when to be joyful over somethin' of national importance or when to be sad. You try to take a middlin' course, and the result is a sickly, namby-pamby sorter article, only fit for a parish magazine. Now, *I* know pretty well what just did happen at Brest, and while I'll stick to the text of this account, I'll sort o' interpolate and give 'em the true account. See?"

"*Ces messieurs parlent de l'entente.*"

Potter bowed politely and began.

"BREST. Friday.—At last the festivities in

connection with the visit of the British Fleet to this beautiful Breton port have come to an end. And a noble, a glorious end it was! Nothing that was ever devised by human brain could bring closer together in perfect amity two great nations, and my hand trembles as I write, when I think of all that I have seen during the past week. The fraternal embracings between these brave French sailors and our own! The blare of the bands! The roar of the cannons! The mad enthusiasm of the populace! The rivers of liquid refreshment! The joy of it all!

"Long live *l'entente cordiale!* May it never weaken, even though that sallow-faced autocrat in Berlin, who sits and twirls the scanty hairs of his absurdly *retroussé* moustache and plots mischief to 'la belle Marianne,' tried his utmost to poison the minds of our ever-to-be-beloved friends of France, against us peaceable English."

("*Go easy, Potter.*")

"At seven o'clock last night King Edward sent the following despatch to the English Admiral:

"'England expects every man to do his duty. It is the duty of you and your gallant sailors to

see that no one of our French naval friends remains sober to-night. *I* pay the bill.

'EDOUARD.'

"This kindly message, coming from the Peacemaker of the World, was at once communicated to M. Thomson, Minister of Marine, who promptly instructed Admiral Caillard to hoist the following signals on the ships of the French Fleet:

"'Respond heartily to the invitations of the British sailors to drink. It is a contest for amicable supremacy. I am sending each of your ships a hundred bottles of Calvados. Every Jacques Bonhomme must make his British friend drink glass for glass of Calvados with him for glass for glass of the Whisky Scotch. The victory will be ours.

'THOMSON.'"

("*Oh, là là, là, là!*")

Potter took a drink of cider, and resumed:

"LATER.—From midnight to dawn fatigue-parties of those British and French seamen who were able to stand were engaged in conveying their comrades to their respective ships, whilst the commissioned officers of both nations, unable to speak, tried to convey their thoughts to each other by the semaphore. Only for the

murmured gurgles of content that one heard everywhere, as the gallant tars were being sorted out and placed in the boats, it might have been thought that a vast naval funeral was taking place. But it was, as Monsieur Thomson had prophesied, a victory for France. Whisky Scotch and *Rhum Jamaïque* could not withstand Calvados—when tendered by the brave French seamen with such charming insistence.

"King Edward has commanded that when the French Fleet arrives at Portsmouth in August every French seaman is to be presented with a cask of 100 litres of beer, ten kilos of superior tobacco, and a garland of English roses from his own gardens. What a *diplomat!* What a smack in the eye for the silly Upstart with the Mailed Fist! Let him grunt to himself about Morocco! Bah! He does not now count in the comity of nations—"

("*Shut up, Potter!*")

Potter looked at me appealingly.

"They're *deadly* interested. Why can't I go on a bit and help to tighten the bloomin' bonds of the '*tonty korjool*' you're always crackin' up. This is rare good cider, ain't it? I say"—here he brightened up suddenly—"I know the curé

here. Let's go and see him. He's a good old kipper, and speaks English."

We bade our friends good-bye over and over again, and they embraced us fervently, kissing us on both cheeks, and then, when I got Potter outside, I expostulated with him.

"Well, you *are* a blow-hot, blow-cold sort of a man! Here I have been bustin' myself to boost along the '*tonty*' you are so mighty keen on, and then you sit on a feller as if he had done somethin' wrong. Hallo! there's a hulkin' big tom-cat. After him, good dog!"

. . . . . .

The other day Potter and I went out along the côte to get primrose plants. As we were resting on a bank, an elderly officer in a colonel's uniform passed us. He caught sight of Potter.

"Ah, you young scamp," he cried in English, shaking his finger at my companion. Then he pulled up, and laughingly told me I was in bad company. Potter grinned, and introduced me. and after a few minutes' chat, the officer rode off, jocularly admonishing "Jimmy," as he called Potter, to be more *en règle ;* or he would get himself into serious trouble.

"He's a bully old cove, isn't he?" said Potter. "*He's* sound on English friendship. Wife is English, you see. Jolly little woman she is, too. Sorter nineteenth cousin of my mother. He was brought up in Ireland. That's why he can ride."

"Potter, some day you will get such a licking for your freedom of speech that it will do you good. Now, tell me, what have you been doing to *him*."

"Nothing at all. But you know that little battery down on the hêve? Well, about a week ago I went up to the *grille* and peered in—and the cove that was on sentry made me laugh. He was *the* most awful looking 'sojer' cove you ever saw—nearly seven foot long, and as thin as a salmon rod, and with a melancholy sorter face like a child's coffin."

"What are you lookin' at, Anglais?" he says to me, as savage as a bear, and then he stuck his bayonet within an inch of my nose, and told me to 'get.'

"My word, I *was* mad. So I watched my chance to get even with him, and got it when he was on sentry go again. I can draw, you know."

(I do know, for I had seen an irritating cartoon of myself, drawn by Potter, in which I was trying to explain to a policeman that my dog was registered.)

"So I came up to the *grille*, and pretended I was making a drawing of the battery, and the long cove yells for the guard to turn out, as there was '*un espion Anglais*' making a drawing of the fort, and I scooted up the hill into the gorse, with half-a-dozen 'sojer' chaps after me. It was lovely! I led 'em such a bloomin' chase, until I was winded. Then they collared me, and I was brought back to the battery just as Colonel de Belot rode up, and asked what was the matter.

"'An English spy, *mon colonel*, making drawing of the fort,' says a young lieutenant, swaggering like a turkey-cock.

"Then I hauled out a drawing I had made of the long cove, with his child's-coffin face, and his fearful long nose, and Colonel de Belot showed it to the lieutenant, and they began to laugh and laugh, and then Colonel de Belot told me I ought to be ashamed of myself."

"So you were, I hope."

"Not a bit. But I gave the long cove two francs, and said I was sorry, and added '*Vous*

ne vous mouchez pas du pied'—just to console him, like."

"What on earth does that mean?"

"Oh, it means 'I can see that you are not so silly as to try and wipe your nose with your feet.' Just the right sort o' thing to promote your blessed 'good feelin'.' Isn't it now?"

V

CÉLINE OF CALVADOS

V

CÉLINE OF CALVADOS

WHEN, after some months of indecision, we arranged to wander about France until we found a really nice place in which to settle down, we determined to do two things—no matter what happened nor what suffering our resolution might involve. The first was to live cheaply; so that if we had to return to the British Isles suddenly, we should have sufficient money to pay for the dog — to the Board of Agriculture and its myrmidons, seven shillings and sixpence a week, for six months, for the animal's upkeep during his time of detention, by these excrescences on the face of the otherwise generally respectable British Social System. The second resolution was that every member of the family should keep a diary of our sojourn in France, and that on the 31st of December of each year, we should individually read the

contents to each other, in turn, and then compare notes. We also formed minor resolutions on various other points, which, had they been faithfully carried out, would have made us rank as the most Christian and polite family in Europe. For instance, we determined that no French hotel nor lodging-house keeper should ever mistake us for American tourists, who meant to get the last cent's worth out of his establishment before leaving, even if they became seriously ill when they arrived at the last day's *menu*. We also decided, that if any hotel-keeper, lodging-house lady or male or female concierge considered us eccentric in some ways—such as drinking tea four times a day—we would frankly tell them the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the bed-rock truth, viz., that we were Australians and fair-to-middling Christians, who went to Church sometimes; frequently wanted baths and had brought lots of soap. In fact, we would try to impress them with the fact that, although our colonial appearance might go against us, we were really a law-abiding family and would do nothing to impair the safety of the Republic, despite our having recently arrived from Ireland, where we had lived in friendly

intercourse with the natives, who said shocking things to us about their intentions towards the British Government.

And, as a rule, we have got along swimmingly with the French, even with the local *maires*, with whom complaints have been lodged against us on account of our allegedly ferocious dog, and of our harbouring Potter—Potter, who sets French law at defiance, and yet comes out in the end triumphant, and makes me feel ridiculous when I endeavour, apologetically, to explain that he means no harm. *He* apologises for *me;* tells the people whom he first grossly insults, and then wins over by his blandishments, that *I* mean no harm, and that all the apparently impolite remarks I have made, arise from lack of knowledge of the "beautiful French language." "Monsieur's little children," he goes on glibly, "are aware of their father's deficiencies in this respect, and their hearts are torn with grief at the awful mistakes he makes," etc., etc. "Madame also, *could* explain that I meant nothing rude; but jangling swords and things like that always terrified her, as she is very nervous," etc. And Potter, as I have said, always comes off triumphant.

After three years of him, I recognise the folly

of trying to excuse him to French people on the ground of his being a good-hearted, but irrepressible English lad, who means no harm. Potter, on the other hand, whenever he gets into a scrape, usually with the police, or the coast guards—always brings them to my apartments, or house, or wherever my family and I may be living, to verify his statement that he has a local habitation, and there is no need for them to cast him into prison. By the time he arrives, he has so corrupted and suborned his custodians that they are all on terms of the most perfect amity, and part with the most fervent protestations of good-will. But I must leave Potter for the present.

We began our diaries in the most methodical manner, and kept them up fairly well for the first year. The children's, certainly, were a little muddled and incoherent, but nevertheless contained many facts that, while of deep interest to themselves, their elders—and especially my eldest daughter—deemed it best to suppress for the credit of the family generally. For instance, such an item as this, although written by a little girl of eight years of age, is distinctly incriminating: "August 3. We came to this place last two weeks it is a farm

House with Lots of little pigs and full of apple orchids, they make cider. The woman is very nice but has a Mustarch like a man and Awful dirty Nails enough to make annyone feel quite Sick but she is kind but has been married twice and Mother says she will soon get another husband when this one dies as she is Scolding him to Deth day and night and he looks very Ill. The postman comes once a Day he only has 1 hand the other has no Fingers on it, they droped off from a Frost bite in the pirenknees mountains. Yesterday he came to father in the orchid and gave him a big fat newspaper and said it Smelt trés bon and Larfed and Winked and father gave him a franc and he larfed too, and when he opened the Newspaper it was full of tobaco which Mr Craig sent to him from Utica in New York and father said Mr Craig ought to be Ashamed to do such a Silley thing but he wrote and told him it was Beautiful."

And again : "There are 19 Rabits in the Barn with some Young Ones, Madame killed two big ones and let the blood run into a casserole. She keeps the blood for Mademoiselle Mardon who washes her Face with it to cure the Spots on it, she is an Old maid and very

Ugly and says horrid things, she says the King of England is a Savage mind man and sent the torpedo boats to the Dogfish Banks to massaker the poor Russian menofwar and that english people ought to be Ashamed to help a lot of monkeys like the Jappanese Japonais and she got cross when father said that some of the she Monkeys were very pretty and very Nice and that a French man he knows whose name is Captain Loti in the Navy Loved one of the she monkeys because she was so Beautiful, and Mademoiselle said if it was true he was a Beast. I think she is a beast to Wash in Blood, the postman with no fingers hates Her and says she is a Mean old Cat and no one is Brave enuf enough to Marry such a Frite although she is so rich. Mr Craig sent my father some post-cards in a letter, and one of them was so funny that he took and Hid it but I found it under his bloting Padd, it was a picture of Adam and Eve, they were sitting under a Tree quite Nakid because their fig Leaves were drying on a close line and it said that it was their first washing Day. My father showed it to Mademoiselle Mardon and said it was printed in France and that it was Truly shoking such awful obdecent cards should be printed and

that in England that the man who Sold them would be put in Gail and the woman who looked at it could be no good but he was sure she would not Mind as she was french. She got Cross. She is a hatefull old thing and keeps on washing her Ugly face in rabits blood, and saying at dinner that the Russians will soon Squash up the Japponais monkeys, Jappanese, and that the English people will be sorry and my mother said please dont say any more Mademoiselle Mardon about the war because it terifies me to think of the blood Shed, and we shouldent not talk about Blood shed when we were Eating food as she had a horor of blood, and the Old thing thought Mother meaned Rabits blood and leaved the table and said English people were Ignorant."

After some months in various hotels and pensions, we decided to take a furnished house for six months and see how it answered. We fixed upon one in the suburb of Sainte Honorine; it was not a bad sort of a house except that it was full of rats and none of the doors nor windows fitted. However, we settled down, and began to make the acquaintance of some of our neighbours. Our first trouble was to get a servant, and this brings me to speak of Céline.

At first, I rather liked Céline, but my wife and eldest daughter did not care much about the girl. They said she was clumsy, and dirty, and boisterous, and bawled, and yelled, and cackled, and shouted with laughter at inopportune moments; and it made them mad when they were fixing up new blouses and things to hear such awful noises. But the children, the dog and I stuck up for Céline, because she could whistle like a bird, and never lost her temper when she was told that she was a siffleuseing idiot who ought to be ashamed of herself.

Here my diary begins :

Céline took possession of us just two months ago, and we are beginning to wonder where we are and what she means to do with us in the end. Only an hour since she bounded into my study like a fawn (or a playful calf) carrying an elaborately polished copper cuspidor, two pairs of boots, the afternoon post, a broken teapot, and a loose brown-paper parcel from the Boule d'Or. She joyously dumped the lot down upon my table.

"Voilà, m'sieu!"

"What is it, Céline?" I asked weakly.

"Here are the boots of mademoiselle, also the letters for m'sieu—the postman's wife has

a baby, m'sieu—the théière I broke, m'sieu, running to meet him, and the dog ran out of the gate as I opened it for the facteur and has gone to the stables in the Boulevard des Ifs. Mademoiselle has not yet returned from the Lycée, and this is my new blouse for which madame gave my mother the money last week —c'est trés chic, m'sieu—and I am to wear it at Pentecôte."

"Don't speak so fast, Céline."

She nodded smilingly, ripped open the brown-paper parcel, and then, with a self-satisfied and foolish giggle, flaunted the garment before me. I said, in the best French I could muster, that it was very nice, and added that I was very busy.

"Ah," she observed pityingly, "m'sieu works too hard. There is a beautiful circus now in the Place Thiers—if only m'sieu and madame and m'selle could see it—"

"Yes, yes, Céline, I know; but I am very busy just now."

She whipped up the cuspidor, banged it down at my feet, tucked up the glaring blouse and the boots under her arm, and tore upstairs to my daughter's room three steps at a time. Three seconds later she descended like an

avalanche, darted past me into the dressing-room at the back of my study, seized my bath mat and towel, knocked over a chair, and then caught her foot in the worn-out carpet and fell, and I saw that she had her mouth full of some kind of pins with black, beady heads.

She was up in an instant, like the toy known as a "jumping-jack," and ejaculating something about a fine day for drying towels and the wickedness of a dog who *would* go "promenading" without his master, she fell downstairs into the kitchen.

. . . . . .

Céline's predecessor was a heavy, stolid, square-built Alsatian who, after a short service with us, had succumbed to the matrimonial offers of an Artillery sergeant, in the big fort just above on the côte. She left us so suddenly that for the following week we were at the mercy of char-women. Our French friends cheered us up by remarking that it would be impossible to get another decent *bonne* in such a town—but we might advertise.

We *did* advertise, and next morning nine dreadful females, ranging from forty to fifty years of age, appeared. They were nearly all widows of fishermen and were all clothed in

rusty black. One gaunt creature with a lofty mortuary bonnet of bedraggled crape, short skirts, an exceedingly dirty face, and a run-to-seed look generally, placed a grimy hand on my daughter's shoulders and told her in a hoarse voice like the bellow of a bo'sun's mate that *she* was unmarried, much attached to children, and that her name was Blanche Poulet—which struck us as inappropriate.

Their awful appearance appalled me. Coward-like, I gave them one and all their tram fares and said I would communicate with them by post-card in the morning.

. . . . . .

Then, in the evening, came Céline, attended by her mother—one of those brown, pleasant-faced but toilworn old women that one so often meets among the fisherfolk of Normandy and Brittany. Céline looked like a boy in girl's clothes. She is only seventeen, though she seems twenty, and is of Calvados—tall, erect, full-chested, and yet "willowy."

"Too young and inexperienced," we said to the brown-faced mother.

"Ah, but do try her! She is so good, though she is so young, is Céline. For six months was she with two English ladies of great wealth at

Caen. *Voilà, la bonne recommandation* given to her. And she can *faire le thé à l'anglaise!*"

"That's good enough for me," I said to myself. (I had had to make the seven-in-the-morning tea for a week past, and I mentally hailed Céline as an angel of mercy.)

So we said we should try her for a month, and the girl's blue-grey eyes lit up with delight, and her laugh, as she kissed the old brown mother on both her sun-tanned and furrowed cheeks, did one good to hear and see.

"When can you come, Céline?"

"*Maintenant, maintenant, m'sieu*—my mother will bring my box *tout de suite.*"

. . . . . .

And so Céline came, and although she has broken innumerable articles and tripped over things and fallen downstairs in her eagerness to get something that wasn't there, and wasn't wanted if it was there, and put my rubber-soled fishing boots on a red-hot stove to dry and melted them, and *will* tear out of the kitchen when she is frying eggs to give the children a swing, and serves the collie dog milk in our best and only cut-glass fruit bowl, we cannot help liking the girl. Nothing can depress or repress her astonishing energy and vitality, and

from early morn till ten o'clock at night the sound of crashing crockery and breaking glass is mingled with the delighted yelping of the dog and Céline's irrepressible and infectious laugh. And she loves the dog.

VI

SOME WET DAYS AT SAINTE HONORINE

VI

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When we were living in the house at Sainte Honorine my typewriting machine broke down, and I had to send it to Paris to be repaired. It was particularly annoying to me, for at the time I had much pressing work, and was trying to do half-a-dozen things at once—read the proofs of two books, write a series of articles for a newspaper syndicate, finish a serial for a boys' magazine, and answer some long outstanding correspondence. To add to my troubles, I had a raging cold—not an ordinary cold, but five or six lashed together—and life was a misery. To finish the boys' story was absolutely imperative; I had pledged my word to complete it by a given date. And just because I was pressed with work, and had this villainous cold and no decent tobacco to smoke

and was worried generally, everything else seemed to go wrong. The weather was bad—it had been raining for a week, with a bitterly cold wind — and the children had to stay indoors and were horribly cross and kept on pestering me by asking "What *can* we do?" They hung about my study door and would persist in coming in on the most fragile excuse, and when I drove them out they went upstairs to the room overhead and banged the chairs about and let things fall, and behaved as if they were each possessed of seven devils. To make matters worse, their visiting governess had *la grippe*, and had not been to the house for a fortnight, and on the same day that the type-writing machine broke down the cellar was flooded, owing to the bursting of the street water main; and the landlady, a fussy old creature with a face like a hatchet and a voice like the sound of a file playing on the teeth of a cross-cut saw, came and badgered me about it and said her beautiful *grande serre* was ruined and implied that I was the cause. I fought her with savage politeness and refused to have the cellar baled out, *tout-de-suite*, at my own expense. Then she started gabbling at me so furiously that I couldn't understand a word

she was saying. She dazed and confused me, and the little French I knew ran dry, and, with a hungering wish for Potter, who would have crumpled up the old fiend in ten seconds, and sent her off in a state of collapse, I lost my temper. As I hadn't Potter, I did the next best thing—I called one of my children to act as interpreter. She did her duty nobly.

"Madame Vasse, my father says you are very horrid because he is very busy and you talk so fast that he doesn't know what you mean and he won't pay for the cellar to be baled out. Do you understand? And he says that you know that my mother has gone out this morning and that is why you are so rude and yell at him because you think he is foolish and doesn't understand the French law about cellars being flooded but he does and he says you can bale it out yourself and he is very busy and your rent is paid for six months in advance and he wants you to go away now and when my mother comes home she will tell you some things that you will not like but which are quite true and if you want to say any *single* word more you can write it and he will send it to Monsieur Renault the *avocat* who will answer it and he hopes you will now go away at once

as he is very busy and has a bad cold. So please go."

Potter himself could not have done better work. The old woman gazed at the child in blank astonishment, then at me, gave me a cat-like smile and went off, recognising that the childish tongue could run as fast as her own.

About eleven o'clock, as the children were seated on the cellar steps, sailing boats in the dirty, muddy water, by the light of two bedroom candles, and thoroughly enjoying themselves, my eldest daughter came home from the Lycée, wet and cold, and with a face like a thunder-cloud. There was a fire in the study, and she stooped before it to warm her hands.

"What has brought you home so early?" I asked, as I wearily pushed aside a pile of proofs.

"Oh, I *couldn't* stand it! Nearly every other girl has a bad cold, or a cough, or something of *la grippe* kind, and they are all barking and snorting and wheezing and have drenched themselves with that vile, disgusting musk, so that the whole Lycée reeks of it, and all the doors and windows are closed, and all the *calorifères* red hot and the fumes simply poisonous. I really began to feel faint, and

told the *sous-directrice* that I must leave. Of course she was cross, and became so 'snappy,' that I got cross too, and said that the Lycée was like the Black Hole of Calcutta. I always say that to them, when I'm choking and gasping for breath."

"You shouldn't—" I began.

"Oh, one *has* to say something like that. It's too horrible to sit there in an atmosphere that would turn a dog sick—unless it were a French dog, one of those black, useless beasts with the shaven bodies and the woolly heads and tufted tails. Anyway, I could not stand it, and when Myra Wilbur, the American girl, saw me going, she told the *sous-directrice* that she felt sick—'real, deadly sick,' she said—and so we both came away together."

"Well, go and change your clothes, and then see what the children are doing, down in the cellar."

My daughter stood up, and regarded me for a few seconds.

"What an *awful* face you have, father. Your nose is *such* a size. And you ought to shave."

"For Heaven's sake, leave me alone, and go upstairs and make yourself fit for lunch

—if there *is* any lunch to be expected to-day."

For the next ten minutes I worked steadily at the proofs; then came a ring at the front door. It was the gas-man with his account. I called to my daughter and asked her if she had cashed a cheque I had given her when she went to the Lycée.

"Yes," was the cheerful reply, "and I had some trouble over it, too. The clerk asked me to go upstairs with him to the *directeur;* and M. Michaud told me to tell you that you must not expect him to pay any more cheques until your account is 're-imbursed.'"

"Why didn't you tell me that at once?" I growled.

"You looked too horribly cross," was the candid reply, as she came downstairs and handed me some money.

I paid the gas-man and sent him off. Scarcely had he gone, when another man came with a bill from the boot shop. He was told to call again.

With an air of desperation, I sat down again, and bent over a proof. My daughter laughed.

"You are like Mark Twain, trying to write

his article on Political Economy with the lightning-conductor man worrying him."

I made no reply to her ill-timed levity.

. . . . . .

Presently, happening to glance out of the window, I saw a little French boy run down my front steps into the rain-soaked garden, pick up a piece of board, and dart back into the house again.

"What is Marcel Thomas doing here?" I inquired testily of my daughter.

"Playing with the children, I suppose. He's a nice little boy and well-behaved."

"Anæmic little cub," I muttered.

My daughter went downstairs to see the servant. Ten minutes or so later, I heard a confused noise and angry voices—hers and our *bonne*, Berthe—saw the boy Marcel being hustled out of the front gate by Berthe, and then my study was again invaded by my daughter. She was holding each of the children by the hand; both were soaking wet through and indescribably, horribly dirty.

"Just look at these *awful* children!" she cried. "They ought to be whipped and sent to bed! Do you know what they were doing? They were playing 'a shipwreck' in the cellar

with Marcel Thomas and the dog. Marcel had a board—that was the ship—and on the board was tied a doll with a string of corks round it for a *ceinture sauvetage;* Russ was *ce brave Terre Neuve,* and they were making him spring into the filthy water and rescue the doll. Every time he brought it back on to the steps he shook himself, and drenched them through and through with the muddy water, which is covered with petrol oil, for a *bidon* of it has been upset, and he is in the most disgusting condition, has swallowed some of the oil and has been violently ill in the kitchen. Berthe is raging like a lunatic, and these dreadful children have lost two or three of our best china candlesticks, which have fallen into the water—and there are quite two pounds of candles floating about."

The children were undressed and put to bed. They enjoyed it immensely, and began to read *Grimm's Fairy Tales* and giggle over the "shipwreck."

After lunch, I felt in such a state of mind, that I returned a batch of proofs to the publisher marked "passed for press," in sheer desperation, although I had not read a twentieth part of them. This leads me to recount some

of my troubles as an author, and the things with which I have to put up, in France, where I am helpless.

. . . . . .

As far as I know I have never harmed a single human being except in self-defence, but just because I have written two or three books, and don't know some silly differences between "will" and "shall" and "we" and "us" I lead a miserable life. I am aware that I am now excited and hurried, but I do hope that my case will appeal to some Christian souls who are in the same box (I mean situation), for I was never taught grammar nor punctuation, and I think it is scandalous that publishers will pay a man money down for a book and fire it out upon the public without correcting the author's mistakes in grammar! What is the reason for the existence of publishers' readers if they can't do part of their duty, which is to put the author's grammar ship-shape? Instead, they send him proofs with all sorts of hieroglyphic marks which are of no consequence whatever to the author—considering the publisher has paid him for the book.

If you happen to use a foreign word—Spanish, Italian or German, they write some

insulting query on the margin of the proof—which they have no business whatever to send to the author who, having, as I said, sold his MS., naturally expects to be relieved of all further trouble. They are also distinctly rude over nautical words and terms and put a query mark when there is no need for one. They do not know their business—which is to help along an ungrammatical author like me; and, if I *could* do it, I should like to have all these "readers" put into jail. And the publisher aids and abets them. *He* doesn't care a rap if you write and tell him that Céline, or Berthe or Rosalie have thrown the proofs into the dust-bin, thinking that they were only waste paper. He sends you a fresh set and makes remarks about "regrettable carelessness," and his "reader" becomes ruder than ever.

I had an awful time of it at Sainte Honorine.

. . . . . .

The morning after the "shipwreck" incident in the cellar, I fairly boiled over with resentment at the way in which I was treated.

First of all the postman came to me with some letters and a heavy packet covered with stamps—Australian, English, and long, ominous-looking French ones denoting "deficient

postage." "*M'sieur*," he said pleasantly (knowing that, as it was a cold morning, I was sure to give him a *petit verre*), "there is 8.45f. to pay on this packet."

I looked at the packet, and saw that it came from Sydney (N.S.W.) and was addressed to me to my London club, and that the club letter-office clerk had re-directed it to me to my French address, and put on 2s. 11d. in English stamps, which was not enough. However, feeling certain, from the handwriting on the packet, that it was a New Year's present from a sister of mine in Sydney, from whom I have long been estranged on account of my once telling her that her adored infant son was a spoilt and dirty little beast, I paid the 8.45f., gave the *facteur* an extra stiff nip, and felt a glow of brotherly affection fill my bosom as I regarded the packet.

Berthe tapped at my study door, and said she wanted to speak to me. Madame, she said, was busy with Madame Vasse about the cellar, and so she (Berthe) had come to me.

"Well, what is it?"

"Monsieur, I am greatly agitated. I am of a family most respectable, and I am torn with conflicting emotions. Madame suppresses me.

She says that I am an idiot, and that I have no sense, and that I can lay my grievances before you."

"What is it?"

"Monsieur, *les petites demoiselles* say that that Calvados girl, Céline, is coming back to your house, and that I will be sent away, because I gave the dog the raw turkey's head."

Then she began to weep.

"Go away, Berthe; and don't mind the children's talk. Céline is always sending post-cards from Paris, saying she hopes to see them again soon. That is all. She is not coming back to us as *bonne*."

"Monsieur, you are very kind. Madame is very severe to me. She does not understand my aching heart. And, m'sieur, I have been trying to clean the dog of the petrol. M'sieur, if I were spiteful, I could tell madame something about that Calvados girl—"

"Go away, Berthe."

"Certainly, monsieur; I go away. I am of a very respectable family, and have been well brought up. Céline—ah! if you knew—"

I pushed her, gently but firmly, outside the door, and then called my children into the study, and told them to stand by and see me

open the New Year's present which kind Aunt Esther had sent me. I cut the string, undid the many wrappings—and found some MS. of 500 pages, written in a vile, scratchy female hand, together with a letter.

Huskily begging the children to withdraw, I opened the letter, which was from an utter stranger, who addressed me as "Dear Mr Tom Denison," said she had read all my books, and had written one herself.

"It is my first venture into the realms of literature and all my friends say very flattering things about it, so being a countrywoman of yours, I am sending it to you to sell for me in London. Of course I do not know what price to ask, and will leave that matter for *you* to arrange." And then the fatuous idiot went into a long explanation as to how I could send her a cable very cheaply (telling her the publisher's name, and the amount paid) if I went to Reuter's Agency, and saw a Mr —— who was a connection by marriage of her brother-in-law's cousin!

Locking the door, so that my family could not hear what I said, I hurled the accursed MSS. across the room, took a strong nip, and meditated upon the effrontery of some kinds of

women. Then I took up my letters, and when I saw the handwriting on one envelope I was pleased, for Bobby Stevens always writes me nice letters about my books, and I felt certain he was now saying something pleasant about my last. But I was wrong.

"My dear Tom Denison,—Of course I bought your last book and read it with pleasure, but why on earth do you not correct your proofs? Look at page 179. What is the meaning of a —— brig? It looks silly. Some people would think that it meant a sanguinary adjective."

In an instant I was at my book shelves, took out *The Cruel Cruise of the Collier "Canahooka,"* and turned to page 179.

"*I had had enough of this —— brig.*"

I seldom swear now, although I was taught to do so excellently when I first went to sea, but all my old knowledge of the art came back to me with a swoop, and for two minutes I indulged in a luxury long foregone—ever since I became respectable, and was invited to dinner by a member of the Athenæum Club.

Now in my remarkably fascinating tale, *The Cruel Cruise of the Collier "Canahooka"* (price 6s. at any bookseller's, and no copies of which

were sent for review), I have written some enthrallingly exciting passages about the fiendish conduct of the skipper of the "hermaphrodite brig, *Sappho P. Jukes*, of Salem," and the blithering idiot of a publisher's reader had sent me a proof marked with a query against the word "hermaphrodite." I wrote "stet" and sent the proof back as "passed for press." Then the fool sent me a revise, and inquired if I was sure about "hermaphrodite." Was it a nautical word?

I wrote him an angry note, and said that the —— brig was of the —— rig I had mentioned, and I would thank him to trouble me no more on the subject.

I opened the second letter. It was from a clergyman in Kent. He runs a high-class boys' school.

"SIR—I have, hitherto, always allowed my pupils to read your books, which show *some* talent; but I must protest against a certain passage in your last work (page 179). Is there any necessity to suggest by a '——' an improper or blasphemous word? Why could you not have used the word 'unsatisfactory' or 'aged' or 'unkempt' or 'decayed' or even 'rotten' regarding the brig; though the last term is vulgar? May I suggest to you to purchase 'Roget's *Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases* You will find it an invaluable guide for assistance in literary composition, especially as regards synonyms. In fact *I* sometimes refer to it myself."

"Prig!"

I tossed the pedantic parson's letter aside, and then, with suppressed fury, caught sight of a letter from a publisher's reader—a man under whom I have long writhed. He has twice "queried" the words "rudder-bearding," and suggested "rudder-boarding" or "rudder-casing" as correct, and observed that "bearding" was not in Chambers. I replied that I did not say it was in Chambers, or in any one else. What would anyone, I asked, want with rudder-bearding inside him? My mild sarcasm was of no use, and the words appeared in the story as "rudder-boarding"—which was ridiculous, and subjects me to nautical contumely.

Artists, too, are aggravating. They are so cocksure. I sent one genius a drawing of a whaleboat, to illustrate a whaling story. The boat was supposed to be fast to a whale, and tearing through the water like mad. He was too clever to use my drawing, and made a thing like a Thames barge, crowded with men in uniform. Thank goodness I stopped *that* from appearing. But another fellow was worse. I sent him a perfect drawing of a Ladrone Islands proa, under sail. When the picture

appeared in the book the outrigger was on the wrong side, and the mat sail upside down!

I am now considering whether I am justified or not in writing insulting letters to the noodle of a "reader," and the pedantic parson, and posting the 500 pages of MS. of *A Fair Bush Girl's Dream* to the authoress, without any stamps thereon. Revenge is sweet, and that eight francs and forty-five centimes rankle in my bosom. There are many disadvantages in living in France.

VII

"MRS BASKER"

VII

"MRS BASKER"

THERE are some people who have a knack of getting themselves into all sorts of trouble and complications when travelling, in order to "do the thing cheaply." I was recently dragged into an affair with which I had no business whatever to be concerned, but it was a lesson to me to avoid ever having anything more to do in any connection with people who have a mania for "doing things cheaply."

The Baskers come to France every year and usually stay a fortnight—by the end of which time Mrs Basker is pretty well down to her last sovereign, and congratulates herself upon her forethought in having secured return tickets to London. She and her family, she will tell you triumphantly, will arrive at their house in London with not more than eight or perhaps ten shillings between them. Once, having lost her pocket-book at Dover, she and

her three daughters found themselves stranded, and had to borrow a couple of shillings from someone in order to send a telegram to old Basker, telling him what had happened. No answer came till nearly midnight, for the old gentleman had gone to a golf dinner, and did not get home till late. *He* never comes with them on their Continental holidays—he has too much solid sense, as he says, to go tearing across the Channel in an overcrowded steamer to get into an overcrowed train filled with panting and perspiring tourists, eat scratch meals in second-class restaurants and *pensions*, and sleep in hot and stuffy French beds. So he goes away to Scotland, golfing, and returns looking as fresh and jolly as a sandboy, whilst Mrs Basker and the girls lie up for a week to recover themselves after their *holiday*. But yet they say that they have enjoyed themselves most thoroughly, especially in their Paris shopping excursions—having spent £30 or £40 on a collection of rubbish which no decent London linendraper or *modiste* would stock.

Last July we received a letter from Mrs Basker, who was in Paris with her girls, asking us to send her the time-tables for July of the *Compagnie Normande* steamers between

Hâvre and Honfleur, Trouville and Caen, and also the railway time-table between Hâvre and the three above-named places. Furthermore, she asked us to be sure and let her know which would be the better route of the two—rail or boat—the names of the best *and* cheapest hotels, and also the name and address of a bird importer whose shop "was somewhere in Hâvre near the docks." Would I also be so kind as to go to this man and tell him that the grey Brazilian parrot Miss Porter of Birmingham had bought from him last year was dead, and she would buy another if she could get it cheaper than the last and he would guarantee its health for a year or so. The bird man was to write at once to Mrs Basker and let her know if he had some good, quiet birds in stock, if so she would try to find time to come and choose one when she was passing. There were a few other things she wanted either myself or members of the family to do for her, one of which was to see the Curator of the Hâvre Museum and Picture Gallery, and get a pass from him to admit a party of English ladies to the Gallery on a Friday—a day when it is not open to the public.

When this precious letter arrived, we were

not in Hâvre, but were spending three or four days at Cauville, eight miles up the coast, for rest and quiet. It would have been quite easy for Mrs Basker to have obtained all the information about steamers, etc., by going to any railway bureau in Paris, instead of bothering me, but she will never do anything for herself if she thinks she can save a few shillings, or even pence, by saddling someone else with her absurd and irritating commissions. However, for the sake of old Donald Basker I would do a good deal.

I went into Hâvre and fulfilled all her requests, except that concerning the parrot. I certainly did call on the man, who was extremely courteous, but emphatically assured me that he would have no further transactions with Mademoiselle Portare of Birmingham," nor any of her friends. In fact he became rather excited, and said that he wished he had never seen her, and before he sold her another bird he would wring its neck or give up the bird-fancier business entirely. I bade him good-bye, and hurrying to the Place Thiers found I had just missed the last Cauville-Etretat motor 'bus. This made me savage, as I had booked and paid for my seat, and now would

have to remain in Hâvre till 7 in the morning. I went to an hotel for the night, but it was so atrociously hot that sleep was out of the question till nearly daylight. When I awoke it was 8 o'clock—I had again lost the motor 'bus, and could not get a seat in either of the two following at 9 and 9.30. So I went to a livery stable man and hired a *voiture* to drive me to Cauville. During the journey my thoughts were very much with Mrs Basker.

Arrived at the little hotel at Cauville I was greeted with the cheering information that a second letter had come from Mrs Basker by the first post. She had changed her plans and might not, she wrote, come to Hâvre as soon as she had intended; but would be sure to let us know; also there would be six of them, as she and her daughters had "joined forces with Mrs and Miss Coucher—to do Honfleur and Caen in company."

"I wish she and her friends would 'join forces' and go to—"

"Honfleur," hurriedly interrupted my wife; "that is just as hot. But what on earth am I to say to this—a P.S. as usual."

"Ah, quite so! The sting is in the tail? Wants something to be done, I suppose?"

I remarked gloomily. "I won't do anything more for this idiot of a woman, much as I love old Donald. As it is, her senseless requests have caused me much annoyance and made me spend nearly forty francs—fifteen or more for my hotel expenses, fifteen for the *voiture*, seven for that infernal motor 'bus, and about five more for incidental items. She—"

"Never mind. It is only once a year. But what *are* we to say about this—this P.S.?"

I glared at the P.S. It amounted to more than a half of the whole contents of the letter.

"If you have not yet given up your house at Ste Honorine, and we shall not be *too* much in the way (I know you have still with you that excellent servant) we should like to spend a day or two with you:—that is, of course, if we do not go right through to Caen. However, I shall let you know by post-card in plenty of time, so that if we are disarranging you, we can go to the *Normande* or the *Bordeaux*. Which is the best *and* cheapest? Let me know to-morrow by a P.C., or better still, by a nice long letter—letters only cost ten centimes now all over France—this has been in force, I find, ever since *May*, and I did not know it. Have spent *such* a lot of unnecessary money in adding

the extra *sou* to so many letters. When I was at Auteuil last week I complained to the Post-master and said I ought to be refunded, or at least have been told of the change. The man was not at all polite over it—in fact, very abrupt, and said I had better go to Paris and see the Minister for *Postes* and *Telegraphiques* about it. I really believe he meant to be sarcastic—so unlike most French officials, my dear. Bought a lovely blouse and skirt at a *nettoyage* (nettoyer à sec) shop for thirty-five francs—left uncalled for, by some extravagant American girl. *Nettoyage* woman asked me sixty francs. Beat her down to thirty-five. It fits Grace beautifully. Hope your dear dog is well, also the dear children and that your husband is doing well in his literary work. I would like to take a French maid back to London, but my husband will not hear of it. He made £1700 last year out of Tintos and I think it hard, especially as one can get an orphan French girl from some of the sisterhoods for next to nothing a year and English maids are really *so* insolent. Will you ask your husband to find out if there will be any trouble with the English Custom House people over the parrot he is buying for me for dear Miss Porter. She

is such a dear old thing, quite pretty, and very rich. Says she knows your husband's work, especially his *Tales for Sleepless Children*. Will you ask him—"

With a groan I threw the letter from me.

"The woman must be crazy," I said; "don't have anything to do with her. Write and say that we all have measles, or that I am showing symptoms of insanity — anything to avoid the faintest possibility of her descending upon us, even for one hour. I would rather go away with the dog, and camp out on the cliffs somewhere until all danger is past."

. . . . . .

More than a week went by and we heard nothing of or from Mrs Basker, until Jimmy Potter and I went over to Honfleur to spend a day on the Côte Vassale. In the evening we dined at our favourite restaurant, and there we met a man who told us something about the lady that made Potter roar, and filled me with a deep and holy joy.

Mrs Basker, her daughter and her two friends duly arrived from Paris at Hâvre by train—a cheap excursion one, of course, or else she would not have travelled by it. It was a

pouring wet day, and Mrs Basker lost half an hour in haggling with several cabmen over the fare to the Caen steamer at the Grand Quai. Finally, fearing she might be too late for the boat, she agreed to pay a wretched *cocher* three francs fifty centimes to take her party and their pile of luggage to the steamer. The man's proper fare was four and a half francs, and, considering the amount of luggage and the weather anyone else but Mrs Basker would have cheerfully acceded to his original demand for six francs. Whether he and the poor horse entered into a conspiracy to get even with Mrs Basker, or not, no one can tell ; but it is certain that the *cocher* took a most devious course and seemed to lose his way. The horse fell down in a faint in a narrow, dirty lane near the church of Notre Dame, the traffic was blocked for nearly an hour, Mrs Basker and her party got soaking wet through and had to paddle their way along the squashy, muddy back slums to the office of the Compagnie Normande. Here Mrs Basker made some strange and irrelevant complaint about the steamer going away at the appointed time, when the agent knew that she and her party were leaving by that particular boat, as she had sent him a post-card from

Paris to that effect. The agent, who was a fat and extremely polite man, asked her in English if she would be good enough to speak in that language as her French confused him and made him nervous. Then he brought her the post-card she had sent from Paris and courteously pointed out that it was not signed, neither was it dated, and that "to-morrow," under these circumstances, was somewhat vague; also, that the Compagnie Normande did not reserve *places* for passengers, either first or second class, and there was no third. Mrs Basker, who was very angry with the agent for asking her to speak to him in English, then gathered up her sodden skirts, said something about her spending a lot of money in France every year and asked to be directed to the British Consulate. The agent said it was just round the corner, but the Consul was away in London and the Vice-Consul was at home with an attack of *la grippe*. Mrs Basker said it was disgraceful and that her husband would write to *The Times* about it. What "It" meant, the polite agent did not know, but said that doubtless madame was correct and had cause to be aggrieved about something; and suggested that she and her friends should go to an hotel for rest and refreshment

until the next steamer for Caen started, which would be at 4 p.m.

Mrs Basker, after asking him which was the *most moderate* and nearest restaurant, then mentioned my name, and inquired if I had left a caged parrot in the company's office, addressed to "Miss Porter, Birmingham;" or did he think I might have left it at the office of the Southampton steamer. The bewildered man said he could not tell; certainly, he added, he knew me; certainly also, I had *not* brought a parrot to *his* bureau.

At last, as the polite and long-suffering official was escorting her to the door of the office, where the Miss Baskers and Mrs and Miss Coucher were awaiting her, in their soaking and bedraggled garments, four porters came up and demanded fifty centimes each for placing Mrs Basker's party's luggage on the wharf. Mrs Basker, in her awful French, said they were only entitled to demand ten centimes for each package—which was quite a mistake—and on the porters becoming very rude and saying "Goddam mean," she gave a franc, to be divided amongst the four. They went off chuckling with the knowledge that they, in

a measure, were even with Mrs Basker, for, as not a single one of the numerous boxes and trunks were labelled, and she had merely said they were to be "put on the steamer wharf," they had, of malice aforethought, dumped them down on the Honfleur steamer wharf, telling the wharfinger that *Madame l'Anglaise* wished them to be sent to the company's office at Honfleur to be stored for a few days. They added that although madame was very eccentric, she was enormously wealthy, and he and all his myrmidons could ask her anything they liked in the way of tips. The wharfinger, therefore, with a great joy, put everything on board the Honfleur steamer, and when Mrs Basker came down, he was on the look-out for her, but was not surprised (having been told that she was eccentric) when she merely thanked him for telling her that all her luggage was safely on board, and with her daughters and Mrs and Miss Coucher went on board the Caen, instead of the Honfleur steamer. When Mrs Basker got to Caen and found that not a single box nor trunk of the party's luggage was on board she nearly went into hysterics, and she and Mrs and Miss Coucher

had an awful quarrel, and Miss Coucher, who was an energetic maiden of forty with a bony face and large feet, and spoke French very well, set to work, managed to get to Honfleur by train, and discover the missing luggage. She took away that belonging to her mother and herself, and by some curious mistake sent all the Basker traps to Southampton, *via* Hâvre, to await Mrs Basker's arrival. Mrs Basker, who was heartbroken over the money she had had to spend, when she came to Honfleur, and found she could not raise even a clean pocket handkerchief, collapsed entirely and had to send a cable to old Basker asking him to send her twenty pounds, as she and the girls were without food or raiment. Old Basker sent the twenty pounds, and said he hoped she and the girls were enjoying themselves in *La Belle France*.

VIII

THE NAMING OF "CLOUDY EYES OF LE CAP"

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THE NAMING OF "CLOUDY EYES OF LE CAP"

We had been two months without leaving Hâvre, and had tired of its hot and dusty streets, and its stodgy, commercial atmosphere, and were casting about as to where we should go for a change of scene — to Rouen, or somewhere else on the Seine, or far inland to the Côte d'Or, and eat grapes and drink in the pure mountain air—when young Potter came along and settled the matter. There is no resisting Jimmy Potter, and I know that I am as wax in his hands. He had just returned from a visit to his aunt in England—the pious aunt who intends him for the Church and a bishopric—and I must confess that we were glad to hear his voice outside, early one morning, abusing, in the choicest local slang, the cabman who had brought him from the Dieppe train, for endeavouring to cheat

him. He clattered upstairs to the first landing, and stopped, evidently to speak to Céline, who was bringing up our morning tea.

There was a brief silence, and we heard the girl giggle.

"M'sieur Potare, you will upset the *thé*."

I opened the bedroom door, and requested him to leave the girl alone.

"Oh, that's all right," he replied cheerfully, "I ain't hurting her—she's gettin' a sty in one eye, I see."

Then he asked if he could go into the children's room, as he had something for them.

Loud yells of delight and frantic cries of "Yes, yes, come in, Jimmy boy."

Then came the sound of paper parcels being opened, followed by ecstatic murmurs of "Oh, how simply lovely! Oh, thank you, Jimmy, she *is* sweet. Which is mine? Oh, they are both beauties."

"More dolls?" I asked Céline, as she came in with the tea.

"*Oui, m'sieur.* Two most elegant dolls for the children, and a large, common one which M'sieur Potare says is for himself," and she giggled again—"*c'est drôle.*"

The children rushed in to show us the dolls, and Potter clumped upstairs to his own room, whistling an atrociously vulgar Parisian music-hall ditty, entitled, "*Les Cambrioleurs.*"

"That's the future bishop," observed my wife.

At breakfast Potter was in great form, and as he settled his youthful but bulky figure in his chair, observed with an approving eye a large dish of eggs and bacon.

"That's the thing—sensible sort o' food, I say, even if it is July. But if Aunt Marcia saw it, I believe she would have a fit."

"Potter," I remarked during the meal, "we are going away up the Seine somewhere for a few weeks. Of course you'll come."

"Oh, yes, I'll come, but you won't like it. All those places on the river are poisonous holes—I know most of 'em. Now, look here. I know a jolly nice place near Barfleur in Manche. It is a hotel-farm concern, and you will like the people who run it. You won't see anyone there but the families of some of the naval fellows from Cherbourg—no mangy-looking artists, nor 'ten-dollar-suit' Americans ever go there, as it is hard to get at except by boat, or by road from Cherbourg. And there's

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fine sea-fishing" (this was meant for me), "and we'll enjoy ourselves no end. There's a steamer leaves here about once a week, and it will only take us about seven hours to get to Barfleur. I'll go and look up the steamer after breakfast, and then send a telegram to the people to expect us."

As I have said, Potter always has his own way; but his descriptions of people and places are seldom wrong, and we follow him blindly.

After breakfast off he went—with the dog. In an hour he returned with our passages booked for the following day. He was accompanied by a perspiring, but grinning and fat "tubby" grocer's boy, carrying a weighty basket. Potter turned the contents out on to the dining-room table, pitched the basket at the boy's head, and remarked that he was the first French garçon he had seen who was not herring-gutted, gave him a franc for a *pourboire*, and told him to "trot." As my wife observed, he used the most atrocious local slang, and the French equivalent for "herring-gutted" is not "to be wrote."

Then Potter showed us his purchases, which, he explained, he had bought "off his own bat" to minimise our expenditure at Barfleur.

They formed a curious, but useful collection—garlic sausages, two Dutch cheeses, American tinned beef, large tin of English mustard, pickles and bottles of celery salt, a York ham, and a piece of Cheshire bacon weighing quite ten pounds. There were also English fruit jellies, and many other delicacies which are unobtainable at a French *épicerie*. Potter explained,—

"You see, I shall most likely wolf most of these things myself—anyway they will come in useful."

Just as we had almost completed our packing, it was remarked by someone that we had only half-a-pound of tea left to take with us, and should have to buy some more.

"You might have thought of bringing us a pound of tea from England," observed my wife to Potter, "the Customs people do not mind a packet or two of tea."

Potter went to the door and bawled out to Céline to go to his room and bring him his doll—the big one, which was hanging by the neck from a nail in the wall. It was brought, and the lad pitched it over to me.

"Feel her—from her chest to her toes," he said laconically.

I felt the putty-faced, cheap and nastily-dressed thing. She was stuffed with something hard and crinkly—certainly not sawdust.

"Make a hole in her leg with your knife," suggested Potter.

I did so, and tea came out.

"Potter," I said angrily, "how can you be such an idiot? What on earth is the use of smuggling a couple of pounds of tea?"

"She wouldn't hold any more," he said reproachfully.

"I don't mean that at all. I mean what is the use of being dishonest, and running the risk of being heavily fined. If you had produced the tea in an open manner the *douane* people would have passed it. That has always been my experience."

"Huh, you don't know the Dieppe fellows—they're beastly uncivil now, especially one bloated old codger with a cock-eye. He hates English people, and ain't backward in showin' it. He teaches the other chaps to be uncivil, and root out everything in your bag. Why, he wanted me to declare the three dolls—because they were new. My word, didn't I talk to him! Polite, you know, quite polite, but dignified. Handed him my card, and

requested him to take it to *Monsieur le Directeur;* said I felt it was my duty to protest formally against such an outrage. He glared at me with his mouth open, holding my card in his hand, and tried to shuffle out of it by saying that Monsieur probably would not receive me. 'Oh, won't he?' says I, 'he'll receive me quick enough when he sees my card and learns the nature of this outrage. He's a father and has feelings—not a crusty old bachelor like you, who are placing difficulties in the way of an affectionate brother desirin' to please his adored an' infant sisters with the simple gift of a doll each!' Then I turned to all the other *douane* coves, and says, 'Gentlemen, you will see what *Monsieur le Directeur* will say to this — this heartless brigand.'

"Old cock-eye glares at me again, gives me back my card, and tells me to clear out and take my cursed *poupées* with me, and not gather a crowd and obstruct business. But I wouldn't go, and clamoured for my card to be taken in to the *Directeur*, and a whole lot of people came to listen, and some fish-women hissed the cock-eyed cove, and said he was a monster, and I could see that he was in an awful funk.

After a bit, he put his dirty hand on my arm, and begged me not to lose my temper, and told me all was well—I could bring in as many dolls as I liked for my dear little sisters. Then we shook hands, and bowed and scraped, and he called a porter to take Milord Sir James Potter's things to the train, and you should have seen the fuss they made. One cove carried the dolls, another had my bag, and another my bundle of rugs wrapped up in a dirty old mackintosh with my long fishin' boots, covered with mud, atop o' the lot. Lord! if the old cock-eyed cove had only probed down into the front part of those boots, he'd have had a fit."

"What was in them?" I inquired anxiously.

Potter waved his hand airily. "Oh, dirty socks an' such—nothin' o' consequence. Now I'll trot and do my own bit of packing."

. . . . . .

We crossed over the smooth sun-lit waters of the Gulf de Calvados, and within twenty-four hours had reached the farm, where we were made welcome by "madame" and her family. The appearance of the distinguished "Milord Sir James Potter" brought smiles to the faces

of everyone, from Madame to the stable boy and the two *bonnes*. She asked us if we would have dinner with the family—herself and husband, her daughter and a niece. Of course we said yes, and were then shown to our rooms—such cool, delightful rooms, with big wide windows encompassed on all sides by glorious rich red roses and sweet honeysuckle.

Just before dinner was announced, Potter knocked.

"Come in, Jimmy boy," cried the children.

"I have just been talking to Madame D——," he said, "about her niece. Did you notice the poor girl?"

We had noticed her—and thought her very beautiful, and very, very quiet, for she had not spoken a single word to us, and after shaking hands had left the room.

"Well," resumed Potter, "Madame D—— has just told me that she is quite dumb, and was born so. She only arrived here a few days ago from the deaf and dumb institution. Her name is Aurélie. Madame D—— thought she had best let you know at once, as she will be at dinner with us, and you would wonder why she did not speak."

"Poor, poor girl," murmured one of the children, sorrowfully. "And, oh! she is so pretty, and has such a sweet face, like my doll, 'Cloudy Eyes.'"

When Aurélie came down to dinner, the children sat one on each side of her, and were very gentle, looking at her with shy, childish pity. She had a dark, oval face with big, long-lashed eyes, and when she smiled at them, her features became radiant and glorified like those of a saint. It was easy to see that the rest of the family loved her, and she repaid their affection in every way. In an hour she and the children had become friends, and after dinner, I saw the three wandering about in the shady garden, and through the orchard and fields, very content and happy.

Aurélie, so her aunt told us, was seventeen years of age. Both her parents were dead; her father had been the principal keeper of the lighthouse at Cap de la Hague, and was drowned when she was a mere infant; her mother died not long after, and the little girl went to Madame D——, who loved her like one of her own children. When she was fourteen, she went for three years to a great institution for the deaf and dumb, somewhere in Central

France, but was for ever longing to return to her native Manche, and be with her cousins once more. This was the simple story of her sad young life, and now she was "home" again and happy; for, despite her great affliction she was of a cheerful disposition, and only at times when you saw her face in repose would you note that the dark long-lashed eyes were sad—the patient interpreters of her pure and gentle soul.

That evening, before the two children went to sleep, they held a long discussion in bed as to the names of the two dolls Potter had brought them from London. They had already been christened "Cloudy Eyes" and "Dream Face," but the owner of the former now wished to substitute "Aurélie," because she thought Aurélie was such a nice name, and that "Cloudy Eyes" herself wouldn't mind. The rest of the family, with Potter, were called into the bedroom to give their opinion on the subject, and "Cloudy Eyes" and "Dream Face" were propped up on their pillows to listen.

We gravely considered the matter, and each gave our opinion in turn, and then collectively.

"No," we said, "'Cloudy Eyes' had best

remain 'Cloudy Eyes.' Aurélie was certainly a pretty name, but perhaps neither Madame D—— nor her niece would like the doll to be called Aurélie. They might think it was a liberty."

"Ah, but why?" pleaded the owner, lifting up her charge and kissing her tenderly.

"You see," said Potter, wisely, "poor Mademoiselle Aurélie cannot speak, and she might perhaps not like 'Cloudy Eyes' to be called after her, because she too cannot speak, and is only a doll, after all, you know."

"And besides that," said the owner of "Dream Face," "it would not be fair to 'Dream Face.' She and 'Cloudy Eyes' were brought up together in the same shop in London, came to France together, and are pure English, and if 'Cloudy Eyes' is given a French name, 'Dream Face' won't like it. Will she, now?"

"No," I said, "she would not. She has her feelings, like anyone else. But you can pretend after we go away from here, that you named her 'Cloudy Eyes of *le Cap*,' because she has lovely, cloudy eyes, like poor Aurélie."

"Just the very thing," exclaimed Potter, "and I will buy each of them a travelling trunk

and have their names put on—'Miss Cloudy Eyes, *Cap de la Hague*,' and 'Miss Dream Face, *Sainte Honorine*.' They will be quite French in a month or so, and it ought to please 'em awfully. They'll put on no end of airs when they meet other English dolls."

"Oh, yes, Jimmy boy. That will be lovely. Just fancy each of them having her own travelling trunk! Now, come up, everybody, and kiss them and say good-night to them, for they are both tired and excited, and 'Cloudy Eyes' has a temperature."

We all said good-night to the dolls and their mothers; but for half-an-hour afterwards we heard childish gigglings and whisperings about the new travelling trunks, followed by something about the gold fish in the garden that Madame D—— had said Aurélie would show them in the morning. After that silence for ten minutes, then—

"Mother."

"Do go to sleep, children. It is past nine o'clock."

"We want to ask you something."

"Well, tell me what it is. I am not coming into the bedroom again until you are asleep."

"Will Madame D—— mind if we call my

dolly 'Cloudy Eyes of *le Cap*'—beginning from now? Please do tell us, we can't go to sleep until we know."

Madame D—— and her daughter and niece were sitting in the dining room, sewing. We went to bid them good-night, and Potter told them of the children's wish.

Their faces lit up with pleasure.

"*Mais oui!* And Aurélie is pleased. And may she not go upstairs, and say good-night to them?"

My wife went with Aurélie to the landing, and we heard her open the door.

"Are you awake still, children?"

"Of course we are. We are waiting to know."

"Well, here is Mademoiselle Aurélie; she has come to say good-night to you, and to 'Dream Face,' and to 'Cloudy Eyes of *le Cap*.'"

IX

"MADAME LA PROPRIÉTAIRE"

IX

"MADAME LA PROPRIETAIRE"

TAKING a furnished house or apartments anywhere in the British Isles is generally a simple matter, neither the landlord nor the tenant becoming hysterical and shouting, gesticulating and protesting at each other ; but in France it is a serious business, especially when the owner of the house or rooms is a woman. Indeed, if the owner be a man, he is bound to get his wife or some female relative to act for him—women seem to be the business "men" in France. If you have a quarrel with your butcher or baker over the quality or price of the meat and bread supplied and make a protest, " monsieur," if he sees you coming and guesses the nature of your business, will disappear and let "madame" tackle you. Only the other day I had a visit from a long bony female who was trembling with excitement. She was the wife of the grocer, and I heard her ask the *bonne* if I was in—she

wanted, she said, to see me on business of most pressing, most urgent importance. Naturally, I concluded that she had come to demand payment of her account, *tout-de-suite*, with the usual tale of having a heavy bill to meet on the fifteenth of the month, and if she did not pay it, her husband would give way to drink, her amiable children suffer the pangs of hunger, her neighbours point at her with the finger of scorn as a dishonourable and thriftless woman and her reputation be for ever damned.

Wondering how on earth I could raise four hundred francs at a moment's notice, I descended to the sitting-room, and noticing her agitated condition, politely inquired after her health. She burst into tears.

I sat still while she dried her eyes and somewhat composed herself and waited for her to speak, and for five minutes she talked. Heavens! how she talked, gasped, and gesticulated! And about what?

She had been informed the previous evening (by some malignant person) that for some weeks past our *bonne* had been buying tomatoes and Camembert cheese from the opposition grocer down the street! Such a thing had given her and her *mari* the most intense

anguish—neither he nor she could understand why monsieur and madame should go to another *magazin* for tomatoes and cheese—a *magazin* that was notorious for the bad quality of its goods and the impertinence of its proprietor, etc., etc.

Immensely relieved, I assured her that the *bonne* had done this dastardly thing without my knowledge or consent, and that now I came to think of it, I had noticed that the Camembert cheese we had been eating lately was by no means so good as usual. Furthermore, I said that the *bonne* should be reproved for presuming to buy groceries from any other establishment. She smiled and immediately suggested that I should get another servant—she knew of one and would send her along, etc. I said, hurriedly, that she was very kind, but I must take time to consider the matter. Finally she went away.

But I am getting away from the subject—which is my experience with French landladies.

When we made our first visit to the city of Hâvre we stayed at one of the hotels near the Grand Quai, and were fairly comfortable although the proprietor and his staff looked upon us as a mad sort of family, with a craze

for cold baths at an absurd hour in the morning. But when I was presented with my account at the end of two weeks, and found that I was expected to pay fifteen francs for the keep of my dog—who distinctly disliked French cooking and would eat scarcely anything—I revolted, said the demand was extortionate and that I refused to pay it. After a wordy warfare of some minutes he cut down his charge to seven and a half francs.

"It is sheer robbery," said my eldest daughter excitedly, "seven and a half francs for giving the poor animal food that revolts him! Disgusting cream soup, poured over artichokes! Chicken bones which have been gnawed by people, thrown into a basin filled with some horrible kind of slush of *ragoût!* No wonder the dog has been ill and melancholy! His Irish blood must boil! Do let us get away from this place and take furnished rooms or a furnished house or something. Then, look at this! Five francs a day for baths! Five francs to pay for keeping ourselves clean, and find our own soap! It's disgusting!"

My wife, in an unhappy moment, suggested that we should either take rooms or a furnished house for three months.

"Seventy-five francs for fifteen days' baths—and *such* a dirty, tin-pot bath—is outrageous and criminal and wicked and detestable. It is a sin to pay it. If *you* are going to submit to such robbery, I will not. Let us go back to Ireland—or take a house or rooms. I would rather bathe the children in a duck pond every morning than pay five francs a day for using a little cold water — and we find the soap! Besides, I do believe the poor dog is becoming ill; he is so morose and dejected. What an awful thing it will be if he gets rabies, and bites the children and we have to take them to the Pasteur Institute in Paris! I am *sure* he is verging upon some kind of madness. If he does get hydrophobia, I trust he will bite this thief of a landlord before anyone else."

"Well," I said, "after lunch let us go for a walk somewhere in the suburbs and see if we can find rooms, or even a small furnished house, for a couple of months. I wish Jimmy Potter were here to show us round. He knows Le Hâvre pretty well and could tell us exactly where to go."

While we were at lunch, we were joined by a young American lady, who was visiting some friends in Hâvre. She told us we ought to

take the tram and go to Sanvic where we should be sure to find a great choice of furnished apartments and houses as well.

"Give just about half the sum you are asked, either for rooms or a house," she said. "French proprietors are all alike when letting rooms or a house to us American or British folk. They don't regard it as discreditable to rob a foreigner—in fact they really do not think it is at all wrong, rather a duty to bleed us, as they imagine the English and Americans don't value money at all, and that we would just as soon pay a hundred francs as fifty. You see, French people don't travel like we do, and they hate spending money when they do travel, and look upon us as extravagant lunatics because we don't care to fuss and argue and get into a state of unnecessary excitement over a few sous. French *men* are not so bad, but French women are just awful—even in the better classes—over money. They will haggle and squabble more over five cents than an English or American working man's wife would over five shillings. Now, you know old Madame G—— at Rouen. She is just the very soul of hospitality; entertains a lot, as you know; has one son a colonel in the

Cuirassiers and another who is one of the richest cotton men in Marseilles. Well, when I was staying with her last year, she nearly gave up the ghost in a fit of rage because one of her grandsons had given away a pocket-knife, worth about ten sous, to another boy. She just shrieked at that poor kiddie as if he had committed some awful crime, and was on the high road to ruin, and would disgrace the entire family by his wild and wicked extravagance. And yet the dear old thing is the soul of generosity—always gives a hundred francs a year to the Animals' Protection Society, fifty francs a year to the English Sailors' Home at Rouen, and maintains a *crèche* in this very city, which must cost her quite two thousand francs a year. But if she lost a sou in the street, or found that one of her four servants had broken a piece of crockery she would have a fit, and be miserable for quite a time."

We took the tram, and went to Sanvic, and then wandered about the principal streets and some of the shady lanes, which are pretty enough. First of all we looked at some furnished rooms, dark, ill-ventilated and stuffy, for which, with board, we were asked a preposterous sum, more than double the

amount which would have been accepted in each case. At one of these *pensions*, *madame la propriétaire* informed us in a very grand manner that in addition to the front garden there was one at the back — "so quiet, so beautiful and *such* a restful place," etc. Would we come and look at it? We did. It was about 10 feet square, enclosed on three sides by high, damp and mouldy walls. The ground was sodden, and there was a dismal, mortuary-like air and odour about the spot, where a few measly rose bushes and some anæmic sweet peas were struggling for existence. She was most anxious for me to agree at once to take her squalid apartments, and told some outrageous lies about the number of other people who were dying to obtain the privilege of coming to her during the summer, but for some reason or another—which she did not explain—she had put them off. She was sure that if we did not close with her at once we should be making a fatal mistake—one that would cause us much unhappiness and domestic misery in the future. Thus she rattled on, oilily and persuasively, her black, beady eyes scanning our faces with the eagerness of greed. I took an immediate and instinctive dislike to her.

"Madame," we said, "we regret, but your apartments would be quite too small, and there is no room available for a study—which is essential."

Her thin veneer of politeness vanished in an instant, her face darkened, and she snapped out an angry "*Bien!*" and with a scowl, opened the door and let us out into the street.

Our next venture was a small furnished house. It stood high above the street, and in front was a somewhat large and well-kept garden. For some time we could make no one hear—the bell pull having broken or perished with old age and rust. At last we heard footsteps at the back, and a very old and exceedingly dirty woman appeared. She was clad in black, and every line of her wrinkled and pinched countenance was encrusted with the grime of ages. Her skinny, filthy hands resembled the talons of a bird of prey, and she was altogether unpleasant and repulsive. Still she was very civil, and eagerly offered to show us over the house. It contained eight tiny rooms, and was clean from top to bottom, but the carpets were worn to rags, the furniture was in a rickety and ruinous condition, and the crockery and table-ware generally were of

the poorest and coarsest description. The house, however, was pleasantly situated, the garden was a mass of beautiful flowers, and none of the neighbouring buildings overlooked it. Therefore, small as it was, we thought it would suit us for a few weeks during the hot summer months.

"What was the rent?" we asked.

The ancient clasped her unwashed claws, and said it would be two hundred and fifty francs per month, if taken for three months—rent to be paid in advance!

I gasped in astonishment, knowing that one hundred francs a month would be a fair rental during the summer and about seventy-five in winter. We said it was "impossible," and rose to go. Then she quickly came down to two hundred. I smiled and shook my head.

The withered old face twisted and the claw-like hands twitched convulsively — "How much then would monsieur be prepared to pay per month for such a charming and pleasantly-environed habitation?"

"A hundred and twenty-five francs," I replied.

The ancient nearly shook her head off in the violence of her emotion, and had a fit of

coughing. What she was trying to say we could not imagine, and giving her our hotel address, we left her, glad to escape.

At five o'clock in the afternoon, when we were tired out and resting, she came to see us and said she would take a hundred and seventy-five francs a month for a lease of four months. I declined emphatically. She said we should be devoured by unavailing regrets if we did not at once accept her liberal offer; there were several other families—both from the country and Paris—who were eager to take the house. I got rid of her (as I thought) by saying I wanted a cheaper and a better house, and that Lilac Villa (as her house was named) was rather too close to the noisy trams.

Immediately after breakfast, on the following morning, a waiter came to us and said that two ladies wanted to see madame—for a few minutes only. No, they did not give their cards nor names.

"Go and see who they are," I said to my daughter.

She returned in five minutes, with a look of undisguised ferocity on her face.

"It is that old fiend of a landlady, with another creature, almost as old and quite as

dirty as herself! It seems that this second fright was once a tenant of the *Villa des Lilas* for six months, and wants to see mother and explain all its wonderful advantages. The dirtier creature of the two says she *might* let you have the place for a hundred and forty francs a month if you will guarantee to get a man in to do the garden twice a week, and keep the dog *en chaine* in the back yard."

We sent a message by the waiter that madame could not see the ladies—that she had made arrangements to take another house, and therefore she would not waste the ladies' time.

The waiter came back—with a suppressed grin—and said that the ladies were *très fâchée*, said we had deceived them, and caused them annoyance and disappointment; and that they had spent money on tram fares.

I handed him a franc to give them, and that was the last we heard of *that* ancient nuisance.

. . . . . .

When, some weeks later, we did take a house, we were warned by an English lady resident of Hâvre, that we had fallen into the clutches of about the hardest landlady in Northern France. As a matter of fact, this particular *propriétaire*

had a much worse name than she deserved. She was certainly very close-fisted, and fussy and prying (she unfortunately lived next door), but had many good points, one of which was that she was a woman of her word, and did everything she promised to do in the way of repairs, etc. But when we were leaving at the end of our term, and the inventory had to be gone through with her, she certainly gave us a lot of trouble. Everything was carefully examined from the lock of the front gate to the garden pump, from the unused attic which contained nothing but dust and cobwebs to the unused cellar which held some broken window glass and a Russian bath without a bottom to it. Every tree in the garden was counted; a linden, which was dying of old age, she asserted had been destroyed by the dog tearing off some of the bark. This claim led to a great discussion (she valued the tree she said, at a hundred francs), but she eventually agreed—after fighting shy of my suggestion to call in a professional gardener and let him give an expert opinion—to accept a young fir plant in its place; this cost me just five francs.

When she had carefully satisfied herself that we had not removed any of the doors,

windows, curtains, beds, cellar nor stairs; and had not hidden any of the carpets among our luggage, she smilingly assured us that the house was in good order, and we parted good friends.

X

CELINE MOVES US

X

CELINE MOVES US

At the end of six months we gave up the house at Sainte Honorine, and decided to go into the country—where it really was country, with trees and cows and fruit and mushrooms and things—and, largely influenced by Céline, we chose a quiet little village in her native department of Calvados.

Céline assisted us to move—my daughter says that the girl simply "shoved" us out of one house into another, and treated us as if we were cattle, and she (Céline) a cattle dog barking at our heels.

But it is all over now, and we are resting physically and mentally, for Céline is, I am rejoiced to say, laid up in bed with a heavy cold and a badly-cut hand, and for some days at least we shall not hear her cackling laugh, nor the sound of further breakages in the *cuisine*. The cold she caught a week ago, by going into

the garden in her night gear in pouring rain, to see what was the matter with the dog, who was howling. She, dripping wet, brought the animal into the kitchen, and in doing so, tripped over something, and fell amongst a number of bottles of cider standing on the tiled floor. Half of them exploded, and when I rushed downstairs to see what fresh calamity had befallen us, I found her standing over the kitchen sink, with blood pouring from her right hand, while the terrified dog crouched under the table, turning up the whites of his eyes, and emitting subdued, but plaintive howls.

"*Cela ne fait rien*," she began beamingly, holding up her ensanguined hand, when her voice was drowned by appalling cries from the children upstairs, and my eldest daughter came down with my revolver, and asked if it was burglars.

"No," I said angrily, "this giggling idiot has nearly cut her hand in halves. Tell her to hold it up whilst I get at my medicine chest, and not make the place look like a slaughter-house."

It was long past midnight, and as I tore up to my new study, wondering where Céline had

put my little medicine-chest, the children wailed piteously, and asked me if "Russ" (the dog) was dead, and would I light the lamp.

I was stitching up the girl's hand, when we heard the sound of voices and dogs yelping at the gate, and *our* dog changed his dismal howl into a savage barking, and knocked over another bottle of cider—which burst like a grenade—in his frantic efforts to get outside. (He is an intelligent Irish dog, and hates French dogs—or rather the travesties upon Nature which are called dogs in France—like poison, and has brought trouble and disgrace upon me time after time in the streets of St Pol, Amiens, Hâvre and Rouen.)

The kitchen door opened, and old Brunet, our neighbour, with Madame Brunet and her son, entered to see what was the matter with *les Anglais*, but before they could make any inquiry "Russ" and three strange dogs were engaged in deadly combat on the kitchen floor, amidst the broken glass, and Céline, in her soddened night-dress, and with my stitching needle dangling from her gory hand, joined in the fray, and beat the French dogs most savagely with a German silver soup-ladle—the first weapon that came to hand.

After an agonising five minutes, order was restored, Céline's hand was finally stitched up, and she was told to go to bed, but instead of obeying she asked if she should make coffee for our visitors!

"Go to bed at once, you naughty girl," said my now exasperated daughter, angrily, "and leave the dog alone."

Muttering something to the effect that the poor dog would be turned out to face the most terrible conditions of weather, Céline went upstairs to her bedroom, stopping on the way to show the children her hand with its ensanguined bandage. She was trying to tell them the tale of the dogs' combat when she was suddenly suppressed. *I* did it. I was behind her.

She fled away to bed, and at daylight began —as some members of my family observed— "to bark like a dingo." Barking like a dingo, to an Australian living in England or France, generally means whooping-cough, and at four o'clock in the morning I went up to Céline's room, knocked at the door, and asked the girl if she had *coqueluche*.

Like "Wee Willie Wood, who was always so good, and who rose from his bed, as bright as a bird," Céline bounded from *her* bed, tore

open the door, and violently collided against me with her usual foolish giggle.

"Ah, m'sieur, I have not the *coqueluche*. *Mais, non!* But I have an uncle at Mayenne, who is of sixty years, and who has the *coqueluche, toujours en Octobre.* He was wounded at Mars-le-Tour, and I have the German bullet—"

"Yes, yes, I know," I said hastily, fearing she wanted to dive into her box, and dig out and show me the missile which had struck "*mon oncle*" at Mars-le-Tour; "you have shown it to the children, and they have had bad dreams ever since. Now get back to bed at once, and mademoiselle will presently bring you a dose of *Sirop Dessartz.* And you must stay in bed all day, and to-morrow as well."

"Oh, m'sieur, it is impossible. To-day it is *pot-au-feu*, and my hand is now beautiful, and free from pain, and the *calorifère* has to be lit, and the dog—*ah! le pauvre chien*—he will be expecting the turkey bones and sour milk with the *biscuits soldats* which are standing on the stove, and—"

"Céline, Céline, come and show us your bloodied hand again," cried one of the children from below, and Céline pushed me aside, and, as was her custom, fell downstairs into the

children's bedroom. (She always falls or tumbles, and seems to like it as much as the Australian newspaper reporter who writes about the "dull and sickening thud" that results when the hangman pulls the bolt, and the "hangee" drops through the trap.)

My daughter chased her upstairs again.

"Céline, you are eighteen, but behave like a child of five years of age. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

The blue-grey eyes filled, as the girl got quietly into bed—she usually jumps in with a crash that shakes the house—and for at least five minutes she kept silent. Then, just as the family, worn out with the exciting events of the night, was composing itself to sleep again we heard her on the landing.

"Mademoiselle, did the dog cut his foot? I think he is crying. Shall I go out and see?"

XI

ANNETTE—AND HER KIND:

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF THE FRENCH CHILD

XI

ANNETTE—AND HER KIND:

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF THE FRENCH CHILD

WHENEVER anything went wrong in the house —which was usually about once a month—I would get my tackle together and go off fishing, which is the finest thing in the world for calming the agitated mind, even if you don't catch anything except dog-fish. A friend of mine—a retired English naval officer, who lives in France, and has a large family—says whenever he is worried with domestic matters, he goes for a day in the country, under the trees; and takes with him Pepy's *Diary*, some sandwiches, and a bottle of old rum and water. This, he maintains, is better than being tossed about in a cockle-shell of a boat. He hates going to a restaurant or hotel or anywhere where he might be disturbed by children. French children, he says, always get upon his

nerves, they are so noisy and intrusive. I do not agree with him. There are French children *and* French children, some with bad manners, others with good, just as there are all the world over. In the country districts of France the children even of the poor peasantry, and especially the fisher-folk, are better mannered and more polite than those bred in the large towns.

In the quiet, country town in which we are now living, there are three of the most delightful French children I have ever met, and they and my little girls are fast friends and companions. Their house stands, near mine, in its own grounds, and every morning, as soon as their *petit déjeuner* is finished, the children go into the garden to await the arrival of "my little lot." As I write by my window I hear the merry clamour of their voices in high glee, as they play together amongst the thick shrubbery. Those people who seriously have *l'entente* at heart should see and hear them.

Their father is a naval officer, and they seldom see him; but, whenever he does come home on leave, the house and garden opposite my study window are the scene of continuous enjoyment and happiness, in which the two

petites Anglaises always participate, although they are much younger than their charming French friends, the eldest of whom is a lad of over fourteen, while his two sisters are respectively thirteen and eleven. The boy, in spite of looking somewhat delicate, is essentially a manly boy, passionately fond of his sisters, and as tender and gentle with very young children as if he were an old man of seventy with a grandfather's heart. Then, too, he is a lover of birds and animals and Nature generally, and speaks and behaves to his elders as befits a descendant of one of the oldest families in France—a family which, notwithstanding the alteration in its fortunes during the last century, has always preserved its pride, integrity and honour. You can see that in the faces of all three children before you hear their voices. Their very way of speaking to their servants—servants whose fathers have served their fathers for generations past—is different from that of the children of the rich cotton-broker, or coffee-merchant, or wool-importer. How else could it be with children with such family history and traditions? And they are usual types of a certain class of French children which Republican institutions will take long to

destroy in France. You may chance to meet other such children in the Southern United States, or among some of the *old* New England families in the North, but never in the fabulously rich and "pushing" Yankee families who permeate Europe with their vulgarity and dollars.

But certainly I have had other experiences of French children, which have not been pleasant, and which have filled me with most unchristian-like feelings. With a German friend, I was once spending a week or two at a pension-farm in Manche. There were half-a-dozen other visitors, among whom was a charming American lady on her second visit to France. One morning, as I was going for a stroll along the shady country road, I met her at the gate with a somewhat flushed face.

"Well," she exclaimed, "you English people say and write real horrid things about the 'objectionable' manners of American children —and I admit that they are allowed too much freedom of speech in the presence of their elders—but, goodness me, the French child! Why, it is a monstrosity!"

"Ah, I thought you said a few days ago that the average French child had a lot of brains and

that the English boy or girl suffered in comparison."

"I did, and I think I am right to a certain extent. You don't let your children, well—expand their intellects as we Americans do. We believe in encouraging, not suppressing, cleverness."

"Most English parents—except those who are fools—dislike precocity and curb it. But tell me what is wrong with the 'brilliant, vivacious French child?'"

"I have just been over the farm with Annette, who has been 'explaining' things to me. My! That child is only eleven and—well, she is quite competent to set up in business as a *sage-femme*. I had to tell her to stop. She just made me feel sick."

"Ah," I said, "I know what you mean by her 'explaining' things. But she is not conscious that she ever says anything out of the common. Her fond mother never checks her; and then, you see, you cannot take her family as a type of the average Manche farming family. They are all town-bred people, and only came into the country five years ago, when the mother came into some money and bought this place. Their neighbours, you may have

noticed, do not associate much with them. As for Annette and her brothers, they certainly are not pleasant children, I must admit. But that is the parents' fault. The children of the working people about here—I mean, of course, the peasant proprietors—would be soundly cuffed, or at least sternly checked if they showed the disgusting 'precocity' of Annette."

Annette is one of five children ranging in age from her brother of sixteen to the youngest girl of six. She has a skin like the sheen of a pearl (which is marvellous considering the amount of indigestible food she bolts five times a day), big, deer-like eyes, long-lashed; daintily-shaped but seldom clean hands; a thin, rasping, and petulant voice even in her merriest mood; and a physique like that of a starved and homeless cat—narrow-chested, spider-legged, and staminaless generally. Yet she seems full of vitality—nervous, irritable vitality—eats as much food as an English navvy, and certainly has, as my American lady friend says, "heaps of sense." But to see the child eating is painful, though interesting in a way; to hear her talk is nerve-shattering.

An English mother observing her would say that santonine powders were what she wanted.

Mind, Annette is one of a very common type of French girl-children. Her parents are now well-to-do and she and her brothers and sisters receive a good education as far as books go—the boys at the public *lycée*, the girls at a school conducted by some religious sisterhood.

An English girl of eleven years of age, like Annette, would be sent to bed at, say, nine o'clock; but she and her younger sisters sit down to dinner at 6.30 p.m., and stay up until eleven, or later, listening to the conversation of their elders.

They are "expanding their intellects"—listening to and commenting upon subjects that would never even be alluded to in an ordinary respectable English family at the dinner-table. Subjects such as murders, *crimes passionelles*, divorces—which no English labouring man would bring up at his homely table in the hearing of his children without having his wife hurl the family tea-pot at his head.

Annette attends a convent school, where she is taught all the proprieties, and enlightened as to the iniquities of the present wicked and "godless" Government. She returns home at 4.30, and usually has two or three hours' "preparation" to do four nights out of six.

During these lessons she and her brothers each drink a large bowl of potage or coffee and eat half a pound of new bread thickly plastered with *confiture* of some kind, finishing up with half a pint of cider. This is to give them staying power until dinner-time, from 6.30 to 7 p.m. They eat rapidly and to excess, invariably asking for and obtaining a second helping of soup or meat before their elders have taken more than a few mouthfuls. All through the meal, whether their mouths are full or not, they talk, talk incessantly. The presence of strangers is no deterrent to the talkative propensities of this kind of French children. Their parents never check them. To do so would be "cruel."

. . . . . .

Annette's mother tells her to go upstairs and see if Jeanne, the *bonne*, is there. She goes to the door, throws it open, and screams "Jeanne!" four times. No answer. Annette slams the door with a violent bang, and stamps upstairs, yelling for Jeanne at every step. She returns, bursts open the door, bangs it to again with a terrific crash, pushes her way back to her seat, and begins to eat with violent haste.

Jacques (aged sixteen) finishes first and goes

out, tearing open the door and closing it with the usual crash—it is the custom in France to ill-treat doors. In a few minutes you may hear him bawling out on the landing for *papa* or *maman* to come to him.

"I want a bootlace. Come and find one" (or something similar).

And *papa* or *maman* obediently goes, for this sort of French child usually bosses his parents. He or she thinks that parents are made to wait upon children.

Dinner is over, and the foreign visitors, after coffee is served, go into the *salon*, fondly imagining (if they are new to the manners of French children) that they will get away from the clamour. They are bitterly mistaken. The *petites* come, too, and join in the conversation until it is bed-time.

At 11.30 p.m. the *petites* very likely want a little *goût* of some sort. It is given, and they stamp upstairs, all shouting at each other as if they were half a mile apart.

Then you hear half-a-dozen doors banging and boots thrown out on the landing. Then more doors banging. This awful variety of the French child has gone to bed.

XII

"CÉLINE EST FIANCÉE"

XII

"CÉLINE EST FIANCÉE"

I LOATHE the French military spirit. Its existence is a menace — a glaring, standing menace to the peace of nations, it embitters the relations between the English master and mistress and the French *bonne*, and inculcates in the minds of the former a hot, burning dislike of the flaunting, insidious myrmidons in blue coats, scarlet képis and pants, and boots that seem to be in the final stage of elephantiasis.

Céline is a victim of this devastating curse of militarism. She is going to leave us—leave us!—to marry a wretched soldier man, and she owes us twenty-five francs, which we advanced her to help bury the uncle at Mayenne, who always had *coqueluche* in October and who received a German bullet in his internal economy at Mars-le-Tour. My daughter has the bullet as security for repayment of the twenty-five francs.

Some weeks ago, after we had returned from the country and taken a house in town, we gave the creature a week's leave to attend the funeral of *son oncle*. After embracing the dog, and bidding him be of good heart until her return from Mayenne, she seized her bag and bolted out of the house to catch the train.

In a few minutes we heard angry voices in excitable contention, and looking out of the windows we saw Céline in the lane surrounded by half-a-dozen fierce women, who appeared to be accusing her of murder, or some minor kind of violence. It seems that in tearing up the steps she had knocked down a child and made its nose bleed.

I squared the mother of the injured infant with two francs, and eagerly assented to her loudly-expressed opinion that "this ungraceful, noisy camel from Calvados wanted a whipping." Then I pushed Céline out of the way, and bade her hurry.

At eleven o'clock p.m. she came back and gigglingly informed me that she had forgotten her purse and lost the train. Next morning she actually did get away, and the house was as quiet as an ordinary, well-conducted grave.

Two days before her leave was up she returned—accompanied by a soldier. She brought him into my study, introduced him as her *fiancé*, and said he had brought me a cheese made by his mother at some village in Calvados with an unpronounceable name.

I accepted the cheese with a gloomy expression of thanks, gave the warrior a cigar and something to drink, and thought he was going, as he could see that I was busy. But Céline said he was anxious to show me his school certificates, and a *bonne caractère* from a blacksmith at Rouen with whom he had served an apprenticeship of three years. It was no use my pleading that I did not understand French. Céline gigglingly affirmed that I could read it beautifully (which I can't), and I had to wade through the documents, after which the man had another drink. (I must mention that every member of my family was out, and I was miserably helpless.)

"Most excellent," I said, as I handed back the soiled papers.

Céline's blue-grey eyes sparkled. "See, Eugène, did I not say that *m'sieur* would be so pleased to see you." And then she rattled off something about Eugène's brother, who was a

local butcher, and from whom Eugène was getting some bones for the dog.

. . . . . .

Céline, as I have before mentioned, has several good points, for which we forgave her many things—her breakages of crockery and glass, her loud whistling (she is a born *siffleuse*), her appalling, cackling laugh, and her persistency in falling down stairs, and stumbling up again, and making a squeaking noise with her hand on the banisters when she descends in the ordinary way. The chief of these good points are, her undeviating honesty, her willingness to do anything, from unnecessarily helping the coal man trim the coal in the cellar and assisting the gardener to prune the trees, to ironing the children's pinafores, instead of sending them to the *blanchisseuse*, whom she considers a shark and a fraud; and, lastly, her love for the dog—my dog.

The dog, I firmly believe, knows that Céline is engaged, for she talks to him about her *fiancé*, and the animal knows that when Céline goes there will be no bones from the *fiancé's* brother.

But, nuisance as she is, we have vague, trembling hopes that the marriage will not

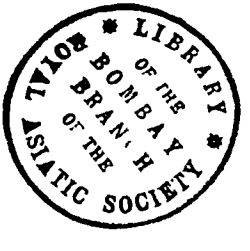
come off, and that she will remain to please and worry us through the year.

For, yesterday afternoon, a truthful little maid of six years of age declared,—

"I saw the little fat postman with the red moustache kiss Céline—and Céline laughed!"

XIII

BERTHE SUCCEEDS CÉLINE



XIII

BERTHE SUCCEEDS CÉLINE

WHEN Céline left us some months ago to marry her soldier lover, the house seemed strangely, funereally silent, even though Berthe, the new *bonne à tout faire* is a noisy, clacking, heavy-saboted animal. We missed Céline's cackling laugh, her loud and intolerable whistling, and the sound of glass and crockery and things smashing, as she fell up and down stairs and tripped over the dog. But even the children were, I fatuously imagined, now resigned to her loss. *I was* quite cheerful, but *now* I am haunted by a horrid, ghastly doubt. For after all, Céline is not yet married.

Six weeks after she went away to Paris, she wrote to us saying that she was *désolée*—the colonel commanding her *fiancé's* regiment had wickedly and suddenly withdrawn his permission for him to marry, and said that Eugène must do nearly a year's more service. We replied

with our *condoléances*, and carefully mentioned that our new *bonne* was very content, and gave us satisfaction. But from time to time Céline writes or sends glaring post-cards of affection, and remarks that she misses the sea air, that Paris is very cold, and that her *fiancé's* relations are not quite nice to her, because she has no *dot*.

"Poor girl," said my eldest daughter.

"Now, just listen to me," I said firmly, tossing Céline's letter aside, "don't send the girl even a *sou* post-card. I can see what the clattering camel is driving at. She wants to come back, and I won't have her at any price. Berthe is doing very well."

My wife interposed, "So *you* think, but Berthe is as great a flirt as Céline—"

"The little red-headed postman was always kissing her," I said angrily, "and the children saw it. And furthermore I can tell you that no sooner had Céline's lanky-legged, splay-footed infantry-man gone away from here, when I saw her kissing her hand to the Artillery Colonel's *ordonnance* next door—and *he* is a married man."

"She is hardly eighteen, and very thoughtless, I know," said my wife, tapping her fingers

rapidly on my study table. "Now, Berthe is three-and-twenty, and—"

"Well, what about Berthe!" I said wearily. "She's noisy, *I* know, but you yourself say that she is clean, industrious and willing, and makes non-poisonous soup. What has she been doing?"

"Meeting one of those light-blue tunicked soldiers with the baggy boots—*chasseurs*, I think they are called—ridiculous-looking creatures with swords as long as themselves. Madame Dupleix told me all about her."

"Well, we can't stop it. The girl must go out sometimes, and this is a garrison town, and our immediate neighbours being military men, with soldier servants, it is only natural that the *bonnes* should—"

"Oh, if you are going to excuse Berthe on those grounds—you men . . . that's all I have to say—except that the beautiful Berthe is a shameless flirt. Céline was little more than a child—"

"And Dr Guilbert said he thought she had a weak chest," murmured my daughter.

This was the last straw.

"A weak chest! *a weak chest!*" I retorted savagely. "The creature had a laugh like the

trumpeting of an elephant, and could whistle as loudly as a fog-horn. Guilbert is of a sarcastic turn of mind, and loathed the clumsy creature for her whistling and idiotic laugh! He was simply pulling your leg—"

My wife and daughter regarded me with serious contempt for some seconds, and then the former observed that as I had often made some absurd remark about "dealing with the devil you know, in preference to the devil you don't know," I would perhaps think about Céline—with all her faults.

Left alone, I pondered over the situation. We have lived in France for three years, and wherever we pitch our tent the soldier man has managed to put his foot in, in pursuit of the *bonne*, and upset that domestic. Madeleine, a heavy, cow-like Alsacienne, left us to marry an artilleryman; Jeanne, her predecessor, we had to dismiss for coming to us as a single woman whilst she was actually married to a *hussard* who was doing twelve months in prison at Bordeaux; Céline left us for an infantryman of the line—and now here is something cropping up about Berthe.

I hate the whole thing. And the way womenkind change their feelings in regard

to servants is something awful to remember. Here was Céline—praised one day, scolded the next, eulogised one moment for her affection for the children and threatened with dismissal the next for breaking a jug, or tea-set or something. Confound these soldiers. This fatuous admiration for the military is the curse of the French *bonne.* Soldiers, in England, I know, are absolutely necessary, not always for war, but always for the nursery interest. All our immediate neighbours in this town are French officers with whom my family and I are on excellent terms, and when any of their friends or relatives die, we receive envelopes a foot long, and eight inches wide, with a black border of one and a half inches, covering a printed invitation on paper of the same funereal character, to attend the obsequies. But they are good fellows—when you really get to know 'em.

I rang the bell for Berthe.

. . . . . .

"Berthe, who is this soldier whom I am told that you are meeting?"

"My brother-in-law, *m'sieur.*"

"Berthe, your last *caractère* from the American family at Dinard—"

"They were very rich, *m'sieur, mais très vulgaire*—not like English people—"

"Says that you are truthful."

"*Mais oui, m'sieur.*"

"Now, is he really your brother-in-law—or a lover?"

"M'sieur, I have deceived you and madame. *Ce n'est pas mon beau-frere,*" and then she began to wring her hands.

I was trying to say something in my bad French condemnatory of her conduct, when she suddenly made a dart for the coal-scuttle.

"M'sieur will forgive me! The coals I forgot. I was too much occupied in getting the dog his dinner!"

. . . . . .

All the wretches get at us on account of our affection for the dog. Their soldier sweethearts also praise the animal and give him sugar—*my* sugar, of course!

XIV

IN THE FOREST OF ST GATIEN

XIV

IN THE FOREST OF SAINT GATIEN

EARLY one cool, brisk morning in July, I set out to walk from Villerville, which is between Honfleur and Trouville, to Equemauville, a small town on the outskirts of the St Gatien forest; intending to descend the beautiful, wide and shady road that leads, almost in a straight line, to Honfleur. I knew I could get an excellent dinner for a few francs at a certain quiet restaurant not generally resorted to by the tourists who swarm in Honfleur in the summer holiday months.

I had an early cup of coffee and a roll before I started from Villerville at 5 a.m.; carrying a more substantial breakfast in my fishing basket —hard boiled eggs, a tin of sardines, bread and a bottle of red wine—and a half a loaf of bread for my dog. He bounded gaily along before me as I left the coast and struck inland towards the sweet-smelling pine woods; he knew he

should come across a rabbit or two before very long.

For the first few miles the way was through pleasant country lanes, past quiet farmhouses and beautiful green fields where fat cattle grazed contentedly, and then I came to the northern end of the forest, through which I must pass, and sat down to rest and eat.

Presently I gave a start, as a pleasant voice sounded quite near me.

"Good-morning," it said in English.

And there, seated on the ground, not ten yards away, with his back to a great pine, was a young man with smiling blue eyes and the reddest moustache I ever saw. He, too, had an open basket before him, and on the turf was a bottle of cider, some bread and a large piece of sausage.

"Good-morning," I responded, "I did not see you, and you rather startled me. I see that you also are having breakfast."

"Yes—just beginning. Will you not come over here beside me; it is a better and softer place than where you are."

I moved over.

"Will your dog eat sausage?" he asked.

"Try him," I said.

He cut off a thick slice and tossed it to Russ, who, after bolting it, went up to him and tried to express his thanks by licking his face.

"Not a French dog, I can see," said red moustache, approvingly.

"No, Irish; bred in the Mairne mountains."

Then we began to eat, and as we ate we talked and soon found out something about each other. He was a South German, and was on a walking tour to Barneville in the Forest, and from thence to Honfleur and Hâvre.

He gave me some sausage; I gave him some sardines and a drink of wine, and informed him that in my basket there was a flask of something stronger which we could dilute at a tiny little stream near by. In another ten minutes we were chatting like old friends and agreed to do the tramp to Barneville in company, as he did not know the forest roads and Barneville was not much out of my way; and a very pleasant companion he proved.

After breakfast we lit our pipes, and made remarks about French tobacco, as the aroma from our own American leaf scented the air. We gave the dog a hard-boiled egg, some sausage and bread and the rest of the sardines before we started off, following a winding path

that led down a heavily-timbered spur. At the foot of the hill we came upon the stream, where a group of brown-faced, merry-voiced peasant women were washing clothes in one of the Communal *lavoirs*. Among them, seated on the edge of the stone parapet, was a strikingly handsome man-of-war's man, smoking a cigar and "chaffing" and being "chaffed" by the women. He gave us a pleasant *bon jour*, and with many thanks accepted a nip from my spirit flask. As my German friend spoke excellent French, the three of us got along very well. He was, he told us, just home from a three years' cruise in the South Pacific, and was now on leave. This was his native department of Calvados—he was born at Villerville—and he was paying a round of visits to his friends in the district. I was pleased to learn from him that his ship had twice visited Sydney, which he thought was a charming place. Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands he also knew, and when I inquired if he admired the pretty brown *Polynesiennes*, he emphatically assured me that he did, whereupon the women laughed, and one very young girl, who, with a wooden mallet, was pounding a garment, splashed a handful of water over him, and

said she would tell Henriette he was a bad fellow, and not to be trusted.

"But certainly, thou must tell Henriette, *ma petite*," said a fat, jolly-faced old dame, with a merry twinkle in her black eyes. "Robert has been a scamp always, and doubtless he has made a sailor's marriage with a black Indian woman, who has a ring through her nose, and is *une cannibale. Oh! la! la! la! la!*"

They were a merry, genial lot, those washer-women; and there was a shout of laughter when the girl who had splashed the sailor with water, suggested that he had best go back to his *négresse* and abandon all hope of Henriette. His face, she caustically remarked, was now so black from contact with that of his cannibal spouse, that poor Henriette would die of fright when she saw it.

Bidding the "washer-ladies" *bon jour*, we started off again, the sailor coming with us part of the way. The hills were rich with heather, just coming into flower, and, presently, we met a group of children gathering blue-berries. There were six of them and they carried some bottles of cider and hunks of bread, and stared timidly at the German and me. The sailor, however, bent down, and

kissed the eldest one on both cheeks, and asked the others if they did not remember him, and then their tongues were loosened, each one trying to push himself forward in front of his fellows to relate some bit of local news that would interest the returned mariner.

Robert listened, with a good-natured smile, and presently I heard him ask the first boy if old *grand'mère* Lamotte was well. Oh, yes, was the reply, she was very well, and was now living close by with Céline's mother, and Céline had gone to Paris, and her uncle was dead, and—

"Is it Céline Lamotte of Varsouy?" I interrupted.

Yes, it was, they chorused, and in a few seconds I learned from the sailor that Céline's mother and grandmother were living on a little farm not a kilometre away. Would I not come with him and see them he asked—they would be delighted. He added that he was a connection of theirs by marriage, and that my friend and I would do him great honour, etc., etc.

We cheerfully assented, for the place was on our route, and so off we started, accompanied by the youngsters. Half an hour's walk brought us to the little farmhouse, and I saw

Céline's brown-faced mother working in the garden. She uttered a cry of delight when she saw Robert, kissed him repeatedly and then, with a stare of pleasure, recognised me, and in another minute we were all inside the cool, thatched farmhouse, and the German and I were presented to *grand'mère*, who was quite deaf and nearly blind, and could do nothing but make a queer, chuckling noise. She had not the remotest idea who I was, though her daughter bawled the information into her ear most vigorously, and then turning to my dog, beloved of Céline, put her arms round him and kissed his black snout. A sudden thought then struck her, she flew to a cupboard and grasped some lumps of sugar with which she proceeded to feed him, telling him that she knew he and her *petite* loved each other.

The German, Robert and I, sat on quaint old chairs of dark, time-stained oak in the kitchen, while the children clustered about the door—and stared and listened, until Céline's mother good-naturedly told them it was not polite, and giving each of them two cubes of sugar, bade them run away. The German and I begged them to do us the favour of accepting all the coppers we possessed to buy some

sweets — and solemnly shook hands with each of them in turn. They took the sous with ill-concealed delight, and with many whisperings and chuckles, went out. "Russ" eyed them with approval, looked at me and whined.

"*Do* let me play with those children," he asked.

"The dog wants to play with you, *mes enfants*," I called. "Give him a long, thin stick, and he will prance for you like the horse of a cuirassier. His name is 'Russ' and he understands, and speaks French quite beautifully. Call him, and see for yourselves."

It did one good to see what followed—the dog prancing and tearing about the field, stick in mouth, chased by the delighted urchins—they trying to overtake him, and he dodging and twisting and circling and turning and bounding and trying to say, in his dog's way, "*What* a jolly time I am having." Céline's mother, standing at the door, clapped her toil-worn hands and laughed and laughed again.

"Ah, *m'sieur*, it is as Céline has said. The dog is truly a beautiful dog, with a noble heart! The grand white chest! The laughing eye! The agility! The intelligence!"

Metaphorically, I took Céline's *maman* to my bosom, and hugged her; and my German friend—for he is now, through that chance meeting in the forest of St Gatien, a very valued and dear friend indeed—was quite in sympathy, and listened with grave interest to all that the good woman said about Céline. That young lady, I was not surprised to hear, was still unmarried, and likely to remain so for an indefinite period, for the affection of her soldier lover had cooled off, and she had settled down to service in Paris, apparently quite content.

These kindly-hearted, honest people pressed us to stay a little while and have something to eat. We could not refuse, and the five of us sat down together, at the big kitchen table and had soup, and bread and cheese, and good Calvados cider. When at last the German and I said good-bye to the two women and the sailor we promised not to fail to visit them did we again pass through the Forest of St Gatien.

At Barneville my companion found awaiting him at the post-office a letter which decided him to return to Hâvre that evening by steamer from Honfleur. After resting a while

and drinking a bottle of good red wine, for which we paid a franc, we walked on to Equemauville, and there a good-natured farmer gave us a lift in his cart to Honfleur. It was market day in the quaint old town, and the narrow streets were crowded with country-folk who, having sold their pigs and ducks and fowls and other farm produce were now on their way home again.

The farmer dropped us at the quiet little restaurant of which I have spoken, and would have driven off; but we insisted on his sharing a bottle of wine with us; then he bade us farewell, and the German and I ordered our dinner. A very good dinner it was, served under the hostess's direct superintendence, for the dog and I were old clients. We had soup, delicious grilled mackerel, steak, fried potatoes, and three or four other vegetables, cherries and strawberries, cheese, a large bottle of white wine and, finally, excellent coffee; and it cost us but four francs each, including a tip of fifty centimes to the civil waitress. Such a meal in any English town would have cost at least five shillings each, exclusive of the wine—Grave—which in a London restaurant would have been cheap at four shillings, for it was excep-

tionally good. We dined in peace and great comfort, knowing our bill would be under ten francs, and that the smile that Alice, the waitress, gave us every time she put down a dish with a "*Voilà, messieurs*," was not of the expectant-tip variety. Indeed, if we had given her nothing at all, she would have smiled just the same and wished us a pleasant trip in the steamer, and asked me if my young friend, "*M'sieur Pottare*," was well. For Alice, the waitress, and Jimmy are great "chums."

Jimmy has a rooted dislike to the American tourist, male or female, and Alice shares his sentiments. Why, I have never yet been able to learn, but believe it is because an American lady once told her that she was not "quite tidy, and ought to try and fix herself up a bit smart." That was enough, anyway, to make the blood of any woman boil—especially if she is young and rather pretty and has been told so by male persons.

"Red moustache" and I went over to Hâvre. He had been called away on some family affairs to London, and I saw him off in the Southampton boat.

"You like England?" I asked, as we walked the promenade deck.

"Yes, indeed. I am not a Prussian, you know. I love England and the English people, and the freedom they enjoy—a freedom of speech and freedom of Press which is denied to the German people. I was three years in the United States; it is a great country, and a free country, but not so free as England. If I could not live on British soil I would live in America. In Germany there is no real liberty. Bah! The German policeman alone is enough to make you sick—physically sick in your stomach. He is a glorified millionth part of the Kaiser. And the Kaiser—ah, well, my friend, I will say no more now. But when the old Francis Joseph is called to his fathers, you will see what will happen. We South Germans have been very patient and long-suffering. And freedom will come to us in time, as it will come to Russia, even as it came to France through the bloody days of 'Ninety-three.'"

XV

AN AWFUL NEW YEAR'S EVE

XV

AN AWFUL NEW YEAR'S EVE

THANK Heaven the thing is over now, and matters have quieted down on the terrace, but it has been a lesson to me, and I shall never again interfere in domestic affairs—though I did it for the best—and never again shall I ask that remorseless young villain of a Potter to spend a Christmas with us. He is the incarnation of devilish mischief, and some of our French friends and neighbours now eye him in anything but a friendly manner; but Potter simply whistles merrily, and greets them with affectionate familiarity.

We are now living in a terrace of twelve houses, several of which are occupied by French Army officers and their families. They all keep dogs—useless, yappy mongrels—and one infantry officer has a blaspheming, low-looking and dirty parrot. Our dog, beloved of my children, is the friend of

several local butchers', bakers', and grocers boys.

Now let me get on to my deplorable story.

On the morning of the 31st of December, Berthe brought us up our usual seven o'clock tea, and in an agitated, choky manner told me that "Russ" had gone off with three common, dirty street dogs, who had called for him at 6.30 when it was barely daylight. (The acquaintance of these curs he had made through the grocer's boy.) As it was freezing hard, and there was a bitterly cold wind, I told Berthe not to worry about him—he would find wandering about the frozen streets a poor game, and soon return. But at midday he was still absent, and then Potter, who knows every disreputable hole and corner in the city, said he would go and look for him. Potter was staying with us for Christmas and New Year. (Heaven be praised he has now gone back to his tutor in Paris!)

At three o'clock, cold as it was, my wife and the two youngest children went to look at the shops, and buy things, leaving me at home with my eldest daughter and Berthe. Scarcely had they gone when the dog marched in—without Potter—in a most disgraceful

and disgusting condition. He was smothered in black mud and petrol grease, and his left eyelid was torn and bleeding. But he was in excellent spirits, although he smelt atrociously.

"You disgusting, shameless animal!" cried my daughter, who was then struck with a brilliant idea, which was, that we should give him a rousing hot bath, with Jeyes' fluid in it and make his coat nice and shiny for New Year's Day. Berthe, in eager sympathy with the project, at once filled the *bain-marie*, and made a roaring fire. Then we brought the children's bath from upstairs, and made everything ready—soap, bath mat, brushes, comb, and a bedcover in lieu of a drying towel.

I forgot to mention that we also have a cat, by the name of "Buster." She belongs to my daughter, and is without doubt the greediest thief of a cat in existence—she is never satisfied, and when viewed standing fore and aft, presents a revoltingly bloated appearance —like a football with four legs and a tail.

As Berthe was attending to the *bain-marie*, the French artillery Colonel's *bonne* next door appeared, holding "Buster" by the back of her neck. She (the *bonne*) is the wife of the

Colonel's orderly, and is a fearfully excitable woman, with a face as white as a sheet, and has chronic asthma. Holding the wretched thief up, she coughed out that "Boostare" had gnawed at a *gigot* of beautiful mutton, and rendered it unfit for human consumption. So my daughter put "Buster" in the cellar for punishment, not knowing that, suspended from a shelf therein, was a monstrously fine, plucked turkey, sent us by a dear old Scottish lady. Berthe, who is a frightfully "gabbulous" and yet kind-hearted girl, now suddenly remembered that a pair of ring-doves in the children's playroom were suffering from the intense cold; so my daughter took them out of their cage, and put them in my study, where there was a lovely fire.

Meanwhile the dog was eyeing the preparations for the bath with distrustful eyes, and the kitchen fire was roaring like mad.

Berthe, having to go into the cellar for something, presently screamed out that the worthless object of my daughter's affections had torn a huge hole in the turkey's breast, and at the same moment the cat fled upstairs, pursued by the dog. I, with murder in my heart, followed, but could not find the cat,

and my daughter piteously begged me not to shed blood on the eve of the New Year. Then I made the dog come down into the kitchen, as his bath water was ready, and I was anxious to get it over.

I took off my coat, my daughter donned a black *tablier*, Berthe pinned up her after skirts and put on *sabots*. Then we cast ourselves upon the dog, and after a violent struggle succeeded in getting him into the bath, which immediately upset—and so did Berthe. The dog bolted upstairs to my study, with my daughter in pursuit, and Berthe and I, not waiting to swab up the floor, got more hot water and soap and things, and made ready a second time, Berthe gabbling volubly something about the dog's manners having been corrupted by bad acquaintances.

Presently we heard a violent knocking at the kitchen door, which is glass-panelled, and through the clouds of steam discerned the pallid countenance of the orderly's wife, who gasped out that our chimney was on fire, and all the terrace would be consumed, as the water pipes were frozen, and the firemen could not get water.

"Run, Berthe, and look!" I cried, "that

woman is such an excitable fool, that you can't believe anything she—"

There was a clatter of booted feet, and the orderly himself rushed in with his heavy sabre tucked under his arm, and his face red and puffy (he had just come home with his master from parade) to tell us that it was not *our* chimney, but the one next door—which was that of an empty house—and that the *concierge* was only burning rubbish in the kitchen; as he was adding something about a *bonne année*, my daughter tumbled into the midst of us—into the steam and the gabble and the asthmatic cough of the other *bonne*, and wailed out that "Buster" was eating one of the doves under the sofa in my study, and that the other one was a charred cinder on the fire—it had tried to escape "Buster" by flying up the chimney.

In my fury and bad French, and half-choking from steam and the smell of a quart tin of Jeyes' fluid, which had been upset in the *tripotage*, I asked the *ordonnance* to come upstairs, and slay the cat with his sabre, and he apparently thought I meant that his wife and Berthe were "cats" and I wanted his weapon to murder them. He gave me a horrified look,

pushed his coughing spouse out of the door, and vanished without even saying *bon jour*, though the previous day I had given him a big plug of American tobacco as a token of my desire to help along *l'entente*.

Then we three—Berthe, my daughter, and myself, looked at each other, panting.

"Get the dog," I said huskily.

A violent ring at the front door bell! Berthe clattered up the stairs, and in ten seconds descended with *madame la concierge*—a usually pleasant-spoken woman, with a strikingly large mole on the port side of her chin. She was in tears, her hair was hanging down in sodden wisps, and she swayed to and fro as she put her hand on to the handle-bars of my wife's bicycle, which was leaning against the wall. It fell over, and the bell smashed, and Berthe, who was weepingly making remarks about the death of *les pauvres tourterelles*, the dog, and the silly wife of the orderly, who was always giving false alarms, savagely asked her what was the matter with *her*.

"The three notes for one hundred francs each, which monsieur paid me for the rent last week. One is missing. Is monsieur certain that they were all notes for one hundred francs—for I am

one hundred francs short, and I and my husband are desolated."

My daughter, wet and weeping as she was, rose to the occasion, and in acid tones asked the woman if she remembered having carefully examined the three notes before signing the *quittance.* The woman tearfully admitted that she did, but that the loss was incomprehensible. While we were all talking at once, my wife and the two children came in, half-frozen, and were shortly followed by young Potter, accompanied by two policemen, who said that he had accused the police authorities of secreting my dog for purposes of reward, and had used insulting language, and commented upon the fit of their uniforms. Then that fool of a Berthe told the children about the doves, and there was an outburst of weeping all round, and I begged the two policemen not to mind Potter, but come upstairs with me to my study, where we could talk quietly. They came, and I dumped down before them a large bottle of cheap champagne, and a bottle of Scotch whisky, wished them *bonne année*, put a five-franc piece on the table, and asked them to help themselves, and forgive young Potter. They were extremely complaisant, and shook hands with

me several times. Just as they were going away, the male concierge came in to say that *he* had the missing hundred-franc note, and that his *femme* was an *imbécile*; and then Potter entered, smiling radiantly, and the policemen kissed him on both cheeks, and said he was a *bon garçon*, but very *irresponsable*, and half an hour later the house was quiet.

. . . . . .

Potter has gone. He is to visit Ireland in June, and before he leaves France he is spending a few days in the forest of St Gatien in Calvados, where he knows a man who can catch him a couple of dozen of grass snakes. Potter is going to take them to County Cork. He said something to me once about a church there, the parish priest of which had reproved him for believing that there were still snakes in Ireland.

"He's a beastly Fenian sort o' cove, you know, is Father Mac'," the lad had said confidentially, "and when the news came about Spion Kop, he chuckled over it to my aunt, who is next door to a Holy Roman, but was crying all the same, because she's English, you know. And I'm goin' to get even with him for bein' so beastly disloyal."

"How?"

"I'm goin' to put those two dozen Calvados snakes into the organ. I can do it easy. And when the acolyte begins to blow the bellows, an' he sees 'em come squirming out into the midst of the congregation at early mass, he'll take back what he said to me about there bein' no snakes in Ireland."

XVI

THE CONCIERGE MENDS THE TABLE

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THE CONCIERGE MENDS THE TABLE

JUST a week after that awful New Year's Day with the dog and cat, the *concierge* came to mend our dining table. It is a French table, with a great number of unnecessary legs, and it lengthens out and expands, and comes to and contracts, and then half topples over and wobbles about and does extraordinary things when the meals are served.

If you try to move it along in a straight direction, it sheers off sideways like a crab, or turns round and runs up into a corner with a crash, and the legs, which are double-jointed, work about in all directions, and some of the castors come off. Once, when Berthe, our *bonne à tout faire*, was standing on it, and Rosalie, the nurse girl, was holding it so that Berthe could brush the cobwebs off the ceiling, it suddenly took charge of Rosalie, who disappeared underneath, while Berthe fell back

with a fearful crash that shook the house to its foundations and our next-door neighbour's servants, alarmed, came rushing in to see what was the matter. In fact it is a fiendish thing, and the carronade that Victor Hugo wrote about in his book called "*Ninety-Three*," which broke loose on the gun deck of a man-of-war in a howling gale, and took charge of the ship, was a fool to it.

After this mishap we sent for the landlord, who came and looked at it, said it was an excellent table, but added with a supercilious smile that we, being English, doubtless would not understand it. However, he would send the *concierge* to remedy any trifling defect it might have. The *concierge* and his wife came on a Sunday afternoon ; he was only half sober, but very civil, and removing his cap, dumped down his basket of tools with amiable vigour.

I was called down from my study to explain what was wrong with the table. The children came with me, followed by the dog. Then Berthe and Rosalie came up from the kitchen, and they and the *concierge* and his wife all began talking at once about the actions of the table and the best thing to do. Presently *madame la concierge*, who is a pleasant-faced woman with a

big mole on her chin, held up her hand and said.

"Stop, here is m'sieur. Let *him* speak."

I spoke, and in a few simple words told the man that I imagined something was wrong with the table, that it fell down and ran about, and the legs got mixed and the leaves did not fit and the casters were of odd sizes and one end was much lower than the other and that the *menuisier* said it was made of about six different kinds of tables, and ought to be broken up, but he was willing to do what he could do for 12.50f.

Swaying slightly on his feet, the *concierge* uttered a contemptuous "Bah" (for the carpenter) and said to me, "M'sieur wants this table mended, *tout-de-suite, n'est ce pas?* It shall be done for him."

He waited while I lit the gas, and then putting his hands under the edge of the table, said.

"But it is so simple. Behold, m'sieur," and he drew the table quickly towards him. It caught him amidships, his feet slipped on the waxed floor, and he disappeared while the table reared itself up like a billy-goat, turned a fearful somersault, and fell apart in sections with a crash amid a chorus of *Oh, la! la! la! la!* from

the women, cries from the children, and the noisy barking of the dog, who thought it was a game of some sort.

Pushing out the children, and kicking out the dog, just as my wife came in to see what on earth had happened, I hastened to the assistance of the *concierge*, who was seated on the floor. He had cut his eyebrow, and was breathing heavily and accusing his wife of having deliberately pushed the table against him. I went to the sideboard, and poured out a *petit verre* for him, my wife telling me in an angry whisper that I ought to have more sense, as anyone could see the man was intoxicated.

"Alphonse," tearfully exclaimed Alphonse's spouse, "I never touched it."

Alphonse rose to his feet and immediately fell down for the second time, his *sabots* slipping again on the polished boards. He pulled them off and hurled them into a corner with wicked words, glared at his wife and told her to give him the hammer, and not stand looking at him like an idiot. Meanwhile my wife had turned on a second gas jet, and was examining the centre of the table, underneath. It resembled the interior machinery of a grandfather's clock —made of wood.

"Why," she exclaimed, "all these wooden screws and things are loose—that's why the whole thing has gone wrong. It ought to be screwed on to the square top of the great centre leg. *After* we have pieced the table itself together, we can all help to lift it up and place it on the centre leg, that's all it wants. Rosalie, Berthe, I, and madame can hold it in position while you and the *concierge* put the screws into the proper holes. *Trust a woman to find a thing out.* Get two candles, Berthe, and light them, and put them on the floor, so as to give more light."

With infinite trouble we pieced the leaves together and all was ready to lift, when my wife uttered a slight scream—Rosalie was standing over a lighted candle and her *jupon* was on fire.

The table again came to pieces and Berthe began to laugh hysterically.

A second attempt, performed in dead silence, was more successful, and we managed to put the top in a correct position on the square centre leg.

"Can you hold it steadily while the *concierge* and I get underneath to see if it is all right?" I said to the women-folk.

"Yes," replied my wife, "but *do* make haste."

Alphonse and I each took a candle, and examined the clockwork arrangement underneath. Everything was in order—nearly—and Alphonse, wiping his bleeding eyebrow, said, "*C'est bien, n'est ce pas?*" I said, "Yes, I think so."

Then we began to screw up, but the screws wouldn't turn, and I said something lurid in English, for I was sick of the whole business, and was hot and perspiring.

"I do believe, madame," said my wife in low tones to the wife of the *concierge*, "that the top is turned the wrong way round."

"Ah, no doubt madame is right."

"No, it's all right," I gasped angrily, for I was choking with dust, "come underneath and look for yourselves, and hold up some candles. *We* can't do *everything*."

They went down on their knees, and crept underneath. And then Berthe and Rosalie must come too, each holding a candle, and all breathing heavily.

"Now," I said, "if you women have *any* sense, you can see that these screws—"

Berthe raised her head, and touched the

under part of the table, and in an instant the whole superstructure came apart, and fell upon us with a hideous clatter and put out the candles, and destruction reigned. When we came to, we were in an awful state, Berthe's real tortoiseshell back hair comb was grasped savagely in my left hand, my wife was lying on a settee looking very white, while the children were standing beside her weeping, and the dog was howling.

The door opened, and my eldest daughter appeared—home from Sunday school teaching.

"What an awful *tripotage* again!" she said. "We shall get a *fearful* name on the terrace. Just *look* at your beautiful new silk blouse, mother—it's torn, and your hair is smothered in dust and cobwebs."

I waved my hand silently to everyone, toiled slowly upstairs to my study, and locked the door.

I felt a mighty thirst.

Late that night, I cast that blessed table into the cellar, and felt better.

XVII

THE FRENCH FARM-HOUSE "PENSION"

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THE FRENCH FARM-HOUSE "PENSION"

"JIMMY," I said to Potter, one day, "here is a letter from some people in County Antrim who want to spend a month in France—in the country, and don't want to go to an hotel, nor a regular boarding house, but to a farmhouse. They have sent me three advertisements of *pension* farms in Normandy, taken from London newspapers, and want to know if I can tell them anything about any one of the three."

Potter read the letter, and then the advertisements, and grinned.

"I know one of the places—old Mother Gervais's. It's on the Seine, between Rouen and Les Andelys, and is a dirty, third-rate place standing on very low ground, surrounded by enormous vegetable gardens. When it rains, all the roads turn into bogs, and when it's fine, they are a foot deep in dust, and there's nothing

to see but flat fields and piles of manure I know the place through having to go there one day when, as I was cycling to Rouen, I met a young fellow and his sister—English school teachers on a holiday—who were looking for it and couldn't find it. They had trained it from Hâvre to Rouen and then taken to their bikes to do the rest of the journey. They couldn't speak any French, and were both dead tired, hot and hungry. They showed me this same advertisement of the *Ferme des Oiseaux*—fine name, isn't it, for a place where you won't see a bird of any kind in a month, except a road sparrow—and I succeeded in finding the place for them and went with them to the house. It is a filthy hole, and yet it was full of visitors. All English or Germans—you wouldn't catch French people going to a shop like that. The young fellow and his sister looked very glum when the slatternly old mother Gervais had the cheek to tell them they would each have to share a room with someone else for a few days until she had more space available; the poor girl nearly began to cry. 'Look here,' I said to the brother, 'if I were you I wouldn't stay here at any price. You wrote to this old fool telling her to expect you and your sister to-day,

and she has the cheek to tell you that each of you will have to share a room with strangers. And seven and a half francs a day to stay in a dirty, squalid hole like this; why, it's robbery.'

"'But what else can we do?' he said. 'If I knew of any other place I wouldn't stay here, on my sister's account. I would go back to Rouen if she was not so tired—and we are both horribly hungry.'

"'Come along with me to a place I know, three miles from here. The people are a decent French family, and I know them very well. They will give us something to eat, and your sister can lie down and rest for a few hours. And, what is more, they will make us welcome.'

"Well, to cut it short, off we started, old Mother Gervais abusing me like a pickpocket for robbing her of her prey. In half an hour we got to my friend's place, just before six o'clock, the poor girl thoroughly done up. The people were awfully nice to us—they have a big orchard and are rich in a way. First of all we all had a grand wash, and then we were given a rattling good dinner, and the end of it was that Madame Raoul, seeing that the girl

was hardly fit to start off again that night, said she must stay the night. By Jove, you can't beat some French people for hospitality. Well, the girl was very grateful, I can tell you, and we all stayed there for the night; the brother and I sleeping in the dining-room, and the girl upstairs. After breakfast we had a ramble about the orchard and enjoyed ourselves no end, and at ten o'clock we said good-bye to the Raouls and went on to Rouen, where I found the young fellow and the girl a jolly nice *pension*. What the poor beggars would have done if they hadn't run across me I don't know, for in some way their bags, which ought to have gone on ahead of them to the *Ferme des Oiseaux*, went to another place of the same name, near Belbeuf. But I telegraphed and got them back all right."

"You don't know anything at all then, Potter, about these two other places?" I asked.

"No. I know where they are, but that's all. But you can keep your friends away from 'em —or from any other *pension* that advertises. You can give them that as a straight tip."

. . . . . .

Potter, on the whole, was not very far wrong

in his remarks concerning the advertising "farm-house *pensions*." Every spring and summer, thousands of people cross from the British Isles to Northern France to spend a week or a month or so at one of the many hundreds of farm-house *pensions* which are advertised in the British newspapers—especially in the religious and scholastic journals. They are tempted by the apparent ease with which they can enjoy themselves for at least a week or a month for the small sum of five shillings per day, and revel to their hearts' content "amidst orchards, situated in beautiful country," etc. These specious advertisements run in this fashion :—

> "Normandy" (or Brittany, as the case may be). "Visitors recvd. *Ferme S. Romaine*, nr. Rouen" (or any other large town in the North of France). "Delight. old Farm. Splendid Orchard. Fruit Trees. Lovely Climate. Excellent Table. Ruins. Fishing. Bathing. Seven francs per day. Trap."

Now, too often, the unwary Britisher, holiday-making, takes in all the above for truth. He may have suffered much in the past from similarly beguiling advertisements of English farm-houses, where he can drink milk, freshly pumped from the cow, and eat as many new-

laid eggs as he can stow away; although everyone (especially those who have not been there) assures him that "they treat you much better in France." So he and his family go to this charming place in France, and at the end of the week or month they are all longing to be home again, and agreeing that the only word of truth in the advertisement was the last—"Trap."

For many of these French farm *pensions* are certainly "traps," so far as having a cheap holiday is concerned, and two-thirds of them, in the summer months, are so overcrowded as to resemble a New York tenement house. The exceptions are those *pensions* which do *not* advertise in either the London or Paris papers; for year by year the same people come to them—English and French families. Artists and the general tourist are not received, simply because the proprietor not only prefers people whom he knows, but could not accommodate casual visitors. At such a farm *pension* as this the charge is from nine francs to ten francs per day. And it is worth the money; for the food, though plain, is good, and well-served; everything is clean and, most important of all, some regard is shown for sanitary matters. Nothing is more

pleasant than to spend a week or a month in a farmhouse like this, and there are many such all along the left bank of the Seine, from Le Hâvre up to Caudebec; but, as I have said, apartments are generally bespoken therein by French people and permanent English residents in the big towns. In Calvados and Manche, there are many *pension* farms which year after year receive the same people from London, Paris, Cherbourg, etc.

The cheap *pension* farm is, in two cases out of three, to be avoided by the holiday-seeking English family as a summer or autumn resort. Why?

The summer and autumn months are eagerly looked forward to by the industrious peasant proprietor. He and his family will sacrifice their own comfort in the most astounding manner for the sake of a few hundred francs. He will sleep in a rat-infested barn, or in the cider shed, and his wife and children with the temporarily hired *bonnes*, so that every inch of room in the house can be given up to "the guests." If, in one party of visitors there are, say, four ladies, he and his wife will expect them to share a room. If they object, then he and "madame" will make "concessions" and

provide another room—at an extra charge. In each bedroom one candle is provided; this is supposed to last half the week, and every extra *bougie* costs five sous—perhaps seven. If the visitor wisely buys his or her candles—ten for eighty centimes, the proprietor and his wife say nothing but "make a note of it," and get even by supplying the offending person with wine which they buy at 30 centimes a litre and charge 1.50f. for in the bill. (You can get wine at 1f., 1.50f., and 2f. — it is all the same, except the name and price.) At the table there will be, say, thirty people, wedged together so tightly that the acme of discomfort is reached. For these thirty people there will be provided as a first course thirty-one small fish; followed by a joint of the coarsest and cheapest meat obtainable and so underdone that only the strongest and hungriest stomach can digest it. It comes in next day as fillet of beef with tomato sauce; and on the following evening it—the fragments that remain—appears as *croquettes* of some sort. The bread and butter are generally excellent and plenty of both is provided; the soup is usually as poor as the cider—thin, watery and tasteless.

Young English children are the chief sufferers

at these wretched *pensions*. They have either to eat most unsuitable and indigestible food or go hungry, unless their parents have, luckily, brought with them a few tins of potted meat and dry biscuits. These can be eaten in the bedroom—with a newspaper for tablecloth and fingers for knives and forks. If you ask for a tray with the necessary table-ware, that is an "extra." English children are used to tea at breakfast and tea-time. They can get it—as an "extra"—and when it is brought to them the careful parent will throw it out of the window, for not only is French tea dear and bad, but not one *bonne* in a hundred knows how to make it—one small teaspoonful of the leaf to two litres of warm—not boiling—water is French *thé*. This hardship, however, can always be avoided by bringing a pound of tea and a ninepenny spirit lamp from England—methylated spirit you can buy anywhere in France very cheaply—and the "guest" can make tea for his family in his bedrooms.

When, at the end of his stay, the bill is presented, the visitor will be astonished at the number of "extras" for which he has to pay. For instance, perhaps he, in his innocence, has thought that when he asked little Jacques, the

farmer's son, to take a letter or telegram into town for him, that little Jacques took it with pleasure. So he did, but he expects a tip for it every time; if you are so negligent as to forget it, it will face you in the bill as "*messages.*"

At these cheap—or allegedly cheap—*pensions*, there may be perhaps as many as three temporary servants—a cook and two housemaids. They are, usually, poor creatures sent from Paris to these places by registry office people who tell them that, in addition to their wages, they will receive large extras in the way of tips from "the rich English." They sign an agreement for half the usual wage, are worked literally like slaves by the farmer and his wife, and by the end of the season may have received ten or fifteen francs in tips. *They* never come back to the *pension* farm.

The glaring want of the most simple sanitary provision in these places must be experienced to be believed. It is one of the worst, if not the worst, feature of the ordinary French house, especially in the country. It does not occur to the proprietor, who has been accustomed all his life to the same order of things, that English people find it somewhat difficult

to accustom themselves to a want absolutely of necessary arrangements, that is to them repellent and indecent in the extreme. If you protest, however strongly, he will express his profound astonishment at your complaint, and tell you that at present there are but fifteen "guests" in his house (of six rooms). "Last summer there were twenty-two, and they were all most happy," etc.

This feature of French life is not a pleasant one to dilate upon; but, nevertheless, it is one that cannot be ignored, for it is one that is, naturally, ever present. In this respect things are *not* "done better in France," and the average Briton or American making his first visit to France receives a mental and physical shock when he first becomes cognisant of the horrors of the French "sanitary" arrangements of a farm *pension*, or even a second-class hotel or flat. To Englishwomen, whether married and with young children, or single and travelling alone, or indeed to anyone used to the ordinary decencies, they are simply so shocking that no language can be strong enough to be printed in protest.

XVIII

"LE TRIPOTAGE SUR LA TERRASSE"

XVIII

"LE TRIPOTAGE SUR LA TERRASSE"

"Le Tripotage sur la Terrasse." That is what the kindly and sympathetic *concierge* termed the miserable affair that occurred recently on the terrace. Everyone seemed to be concerned in it, and I, as usual, because I can't speak French, was blamed as the cause of it, for not checking my Irish collie from fighting. Heaven knows what I have suffered between that dog and young Potter, and my desire to do my little best in a humble way to put out a spider-like thread to tighten the bonds of *l'entente*. Now let me explain :

The terrace in which we are now living is composed of a double row of houses. We are No. 3 ; on one side of us is a colonel of artillery, who owns a curiously-shaped dog, which looks as if it had been born a dachshund, but had contracted its body, lengthened its legs,

and grown up a pug instead; opposite is an infantry captain, who owns a blasphemous parrot, which is continuously shrieking "Goddam," and something analogous in German. (I have previously alluded to this low-down bird. Its master spends all his spare time in trying to teach it new swear words, but it makes poor progress.) In No. 7 is an Italian gentleman in the macaroni importation business, who has a Newfoundland dog about one and a quarter yards long, and with an idiotic expression; the brute is always getting into people's way and tripping them up. At the end house is an amiable English colonel (retired) and his family, who have an Irish terrier, which loathes my dog, because the latter comes from a Catholic family in King's County, and he is a Belfast Presbyterian dog. During the past three months they have had thirteen sanguinary combats, and nearly everyone on *la terrasse* rushed out on each occasion to give advice as to how to separate them.

. . . . . .

Now, Colonel Lamartine, the French gunner man, who owns the curiously-shaped dog, is about the handsomest man in France, and is adored by my children. He is tall, and has

a very dark complexion, a long jet-black moustache, and the kindliest eyes imaginable; and, when he smiles, all the sternness of his grave, bronzed face vanishes. Every morning, at eight o'clock, his *ordonnance* brings his master's charger to the gate on the Boulevard at the bottom of the steps leading up to the *terrasse;* and, at five minutes past eight, monsieur le colonel appears at his front door with madame, who is *almost* as handsome as the grave, stately soldier himself. He kisses her, and she kisses him, and then, as he descends the steps, he smiles, for he sees two little English girls, with smiling faces, awaiting him. Each has one hand full of cubes of sugar.

"You will spoil my horse with too much sugar," he says, as he walks down the steps, each child gazing adoringly at him and the medals on his broad chest. But before he mounts his charger, he patiently stands, watching the children, who, with many delighted chuckles, give the animal his sugar.

"Were the dogs good yesterday, little ones?" he asks.

"*Mais oui, monsieur*, there were no fights yesterday; but your little dog is *très, très,*

méchant, and always begins the combat. He is very brave but dreadfully foolish."

Then the colonel swings himself into his saddle and followed by his *ordonnance* trots off to the forts.

These dog fights are something horrible, and Potter is largely responsible.

. . . . . .

One of the glass doors of my book-case was accidentally broken one day, and the glazier man came to mend it. It was a rather difficult task, and I was helping him to hold the large sheet of glass in position when I heard appalling screams from the children, and the horrid clamour of a dog fight. Hurriedly bidding the glazier man wait a few minutes I ran to the door just as it was burst open and one of ths children flew in, tripped over the glazier's basket and knocked against the glass just as he was standing it against the book-case. Of course it made an awful crash as it fell upon the polished floor and shattered into a thousand pieces, and the child began to yell. But she was not hurt, and leaving her to get over her fright, I tore downstairs, followed by the glazier man, and ran out on to the terrace.

Every house had sent someone — our

meddlesome *bonne*, Berthe, leading with one of my children and their German governess, and followed by the orderly from next door, all screaming to me to make haste with the whip, whilst another orderly from No. 4 (who was in his shirt sleeves) tore out with a pepper caster to pepper the dogs' eyes. Rosalie, the nurse maid, Madeleine, Marie, and another *bonne*, our neighbours' servants, were there with a fat, jolly *fumiste*, who was mending our stove, and the street railings were soon black with people, applauding the scene, while the French captain's parrot tore round its cage and cursed and screamed horribly. The children of the English colonel broke away from *their* governess and wept in unison with mine, while the fat *fumiste* and I each seized a dog by its hind-legs and pulled them out at full length, whilst the orderly with the pepper-box showered pepper into their eyes; but the lid came off the caster, and the *fumiste* got three ounces of it in his face, and let go his dog end to try and assault the orderly, but clutched another man—an inoffensive gas collector—by his collar and threw him down. Then came other kinds of people, with buckets of water, with which they drenched the dogs and the *fumiste* and nearly

everyone else—to the delight of the rabble clinging to the railings. When the dogs were finally separated, they presented a ghastly appearance, and my white duck suit was so ensanguined that my youngest child became hysterical, thinking I was mortally hurt.

For some weeks we had peace—and then came more trouble.

. . . . . .

Berthe (wanting to go out as usual and gossip), told my daughter that there was a man up the street selling cantaloup melons at a franc each. Could she go and buy one, and take the dog? She would be back *bientôt*. *Bientôt* with this fraud of a girl means anything from ten minutes to an hour, for she has very pretty eyes, and a large circle of military friends—the sort of servant that many British maiden ladies would disapprove of as being improperly good-looking for her position in life. With the franc and the dog, off she sailed.

Half an hour later, as I was in my study talking to Potter on the old subject—the duty of all English people living in France to help along *l'entente*—my eldest daughter tore up to me with a face as white as a sheet.

"For Heaven's sake come with me! Our dog, Colonel Harrison's, Colonel Lamartine's, and that loathly, long Newfoundland beast of the Italian's are tied up in knots, with their teeth in each other's throats." (Here she began to weep.) "Do make haste, or our dog will be killed. And there are two policemen and a lot of soldiers looking on and laughing, and all the street *canaille* are gathering round the terrace, and there will be another dreadful scene."

Potter and I rushed out, and found the end of the terrace crowded with people of all sorts and conditions, from the driver of a dustcart to an officer of *chasseurs* in full uniform and several ladies (neighbours) beautifully dressed, and wringing their hands and exclaiming, "Oh, Heavens! it is terrible!"

Potter dashed valorously into the fray, kicked the one-and-a-quarter-yard-long dog in the ribs and laid it out, picked up the smaller one and threw it over into the garden of No. 3, while Berthe, Marie, a gardener man, and I belaboured my, and the English colonel's dogs (who still held on to each other) with whips, broomsticks, and a *casserole* lid. My dog had lost a toe, and the Irish terrier's ears

were in strips. Everyone was beginning to talk at once, and tell how it all happened, each person giving a distinctly different version, when I noticed that Berthe was weeping, her lip bleeding profusely, her hair down and her face very dirty.

"It was this way," she sobbed. "As I came down the steps carrying the melon, the long dog ran out to combat with *m'sieur's* good, gentle dog, and I fell over him and cut my face, and the melon was destroyed, and—" A lady interrupted her by remarking that the terrace was the abode of peace until the two English dogs came.

I energetically protested in English, and asked Potter to explain. He said something in French, and the three ladies looked at me indignantly.

"Monsieur is rude," they chorused, and twirling their silken skirts, and elevating their pretty noses, they went inside.

"Whatever did you say, Potter?" I panted as I threw myself into my chair in the study, and made signs to my daughter to give me a brandy-and-soda.

"Oh, just the right thing to stop their cacklin'. They began abusin' your dog" (at

that moment under the table searching with his tongue for his missing toe) "and I said, '*Bah, la langue des femmes est leur épée, et elles ne la laissent pas rouiller.*' That is correct, grammatical French, and the curé of Mentheville told me that it is a good old saying to fire off at any gabbling woman—And it shut 'em up."

And now those ladies give me a stiff *bon jour* only when we meet, and I am tired of trying to live up to the spirit of *l'entente*—as long as Potter and my dog are about.

XIX

"MISTARE BRUN" SCORES

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We had been visiting some of the pretty little towns on the coast between Etretat and Hâvre, and were thinking of going to Rouen by the river steamer, *Felix Faure*, when I chanced to meet two friends of mine, Captain and Mrs Brown—people whom we had not seen for over two years. Our last meeting was in Paris. Brown is a big Scotsman, with a deeply-bronzed face and bushy beard, and is by profession a railway engineer; his wife is a vivacious little American, and wherever Brown goes, she goes too. Sometimes they are in Russia, sometimes in Argentina, or Tonquin, or some other out-of-the-way country, but they always gravitate to Paris or the South of France for a holiday.

On this occasion I was ascending the grassy slopes of Fort Sainte Adresse, which overlooks smoky Hâvre, when I met them coming down, and we greeted each other warmly. I found

they were staying at a little hotel close by, and had been to look at the cemetery at the back of the fort. The landlady had enthusiastically told Mrs Brown that it was "a delicious little cemetery, with most lovely ornamentations."

"Well, and did you like it?" I asked as we sat down on the soft, green grass.

"My!" and the little lady shuddered, "a French cemetery gives me a cold chill down the spine. The garish hideousness of glass-covered immortelles, beadwork crucifixes and yellow-painted *couronnes* and tin flowers! The yellow *couronnes* look like imitation life-buoys cut out of pumpkins. They're enough to make any self-respecting corpse feel mad."

The Browns had just come from Rouen by steamer and were going on to Saint Jouin de Bruneval, a pretty little place near Etretat, where they intended staying for a few days. But first, Mrs Brown wanted to spend two days with an American family staying at St Romain de Colbosc, near Hâvre.

My face fell, for I was dying to have a day or two with Brown. He and I get along very well. He knows Potter and likes him, and Jimmy has a great admiration for the big Scot and his powers of sarcasm, which rival those of

Jimmy himself. Then, too, before Brown went in for railway engineering he had served in the New South Wales Mounted Police, and he and I had much in common to talk about.

Brown saw I was upset, gave me a quiet nudge, and thoughtfully stroked his beard.

"Now, I am just thinking, Millie," he observed. "You will be two days at St Romain—you don't want me with you, and even if you did I would only be in the way. See?"

Mrs Brown looked at him from the corner of one of her pretty, hazel eyes.

"Well, Douglas?"

"I thought that Tom Denison and I might have a run over to Honfleur, then get along as far as Caen, and come back in the steamer; just a couple, or perhaps three days. See?"

"I see and I don't *quite* see. Stopping at Trouville?"

"No—no more Trouville for me, Millie."

"Then you can go."

"You don't like Trouville, Mrs Brown?" I inquired.

The hazel eyes flashed. "Like it! I loathe, I hate it! It is a sink of iniquity—a vile, vile place! I wonder how any woman with any sense of decency or morality can go there, when

she knows that it is the resort of the worst characters in Europe—a tawdry, glorified, gambling hell, crowded with the richest and vilest men and women on the Continent—from that snowy-bearded old Belgian blackguard, who ought to be thinking of the Hereafter, to the diamond-bedizened Parisian *demi-mondaine* who awaits him there. Oh, I should *just, like, to, see*, a great tidal wave sweep over the dirty sands of Trouville and drown the whole, vile, loathsome crowd."

We promised her that we would not stay at Trouville for anything more than a drink; and we kept our promise, going on to Caen.

Anyway, Trouville *is* an unholy, vile place in "the season," a place to be avoided like the plague by anyone who does not want to be robbed by swarms of pickpockets, swindled by the hotels, or sit down to dine in the same room with the most notorious harlots, adventurers, and "in-and-out-and-upstairs-and-downstairs blackguards, card-sharpers, jewel-robbers, and confidence men" that ever congregated within a given radius. The last expression is Brown's. He knows Trouville pretty well, and is one of those sensible men

who do not conceal some very necessary truths from his wife.

Near Caen, we went to a *pension* which Brown knew of old. This was because he had promised the proprietors that if ever he came to Caen again, he would certainly spend a day or two with them. It was a nice house, with a fine, large garden, and the hostess was very pleased to see "Mistare Brun" again. But there were rather too many visitors there, for comfort. However, we were given a good room, refreshed ourselves with some of our own whisky, and went down to dinner. The host was at one end of the table, his wife at the other; in between, on each side of the long table were the "guests"—about a dozen in all. We were introduced to all of them.

"Some of these people mean to be rude to us," muttered Brown to me, under his beard. "Let 'em. I'll settle 'em, before dinner is over."

The *Matin* had just arrived by the Paris post, and in it was an account of the seizure of an English steamer named the *Malacca*, by a Russian cruiser in the Red Sea. One of the "guests"—a callow young French artist—was rude enough to read it aloud, and a moustached

lady from Rouen laid down her knife and fork and clapped her hands delightedly.

"Ah, those brave Russians!" she exclaimed with charming frankness—"and was there no one killed. Would not the English sailors fight?"

"Madame"—and all the rest of the company—looked inquiringly at Brown. He had a face on him as stolid and as unimpressionable-looking as a mile-stone. He ate a potato before he answered.

"No, mademoiselle, there was no fighting. The Russian sailors—who, as you say, are very brave, were no doubt given large quantities of tallow to eat by the terrified people of the *Malacca*—and so abated their rage."

Monsieur le propriètaire (who is a Swiss and "loves" *les Anglais* for very practical reasons) looked uncomfortable, and tried to notify his wife, so that she could "give the office" to the young lady from Rouen and let her see she was treading on dangerous ground. But "madame," who is large and fat, and a great eater, took no heed. She swallowed several spoonfuls of soup—being belated in her meal—and gurgled something about Russians being *incomparable.*

"Monsieur does not, I am glad to observe, regard the matter as serious," politely remarked an old Frenchman in his native tongue to my friend.

Ere he could reply, a little, fat, hooked-nosed, beady-eyed German Jewess, who displayed much heavy jewellery, interrupted—in English.

"Ah, der Anglische vill get down some surprises if dey vant dem to make some troubles mit Russia." Then she repeated her remark in French.

"Mistare" Brown never changed his jug-like expression of countenance, as he turned to the polite old Frenchman, and said that he trusted there would be no trouble over the *Malacca* affair—"though, for *your* sake, Madame Schwartz, I am sorry," and he gazed at the German lady through his gold-rimmed eye-glasses.

"Pork vor, M'sieur Prown?"

"Well, you see, a war between England and Russia would mean—as it did in the Boer war—a great harvest to the ladies and gentlemen engaged in the pawnbroking business. So many widows and orphans of soldiers and sailors, you see, have to go to the *Mont-de-*

Piété. And I surmise that you and your excellent husband are in that business in London. So, madame, if no war should come, accept my respectful sympathy."

"Vat do you know aboud mine, und mine husband's pizness. Vat?" (This in English.)

Brown raised his hand deprecatingly, and answered very, very slowly in French.

"I have not the pleasure of knowing anything whatever of your own business establishment, madame. There have been, in my younger days, circumstances—regretful enough—which compelled me to seek the kindly aid of Messieurs Attenborough, the proprietors of the chief *Mont-de-Piété* in London; but I am ignorant of even the names of the many similar establishments in the lower quarters of London. Still, if you will furnish me with your address—"

There was a hurried swish of black silk, and then the banging of a door—and Mrs Schwartz was gone.

Brown had scored.

The young lady from Rouen looked furtively at him under her lowered and pretty eyelids.

Then Brown laughed, long and loud, and in a few minutes everyone was in a good temper

except the girl from Rouen, who was cross—and showed it. She was in a fighting mood, and showed that also. Afraid to tackle Brown, she turned to me, and had the audacity to ask if there really were any French people living out in *l'Australie et Oceanie*. I replied yes, there were lots of them—in New Caledonia—but they went about in leg irons—for coolness.

Fearing that she did not quite comprehend my French, Brown very kindly, and very gravely, translated it—most fully.

She glared at me like a tigress, and followed the Jew-woman upstairs.

Late in the evening, as I was going out into the garden, I met Brown and the old French gentleman—I say "gentleman" advisedly, for he was one. They were arm-in-arm, and talking about Tonquin.

I was re-introduced to him by Brown, who spoke in French.

"Monsieur de Kerambosquier is a retired naval officer, who has seen service in all parts of the world. He speaks English perfectly, and fears that we were annoyed by the remarks of some of the people at the dinner-table. But I have assured him that we were not so foolish as to take offence at the irresponsible talk of two

silly women. And, also, *I* have apologised to him for my remarks about the Russians eating tallow candles; Monsieur de Kerambosquier quite understands a joke, and says I was justified. And now he is doing us the honour of coming to our room and tasting some of our whisky *Ecossais*."

XX

A HORRIBLE MUDDLE

XX

A HORRIBLE MUDDLE

We have had what Potter calls "another bust up" on the terrace, and the only consolation in which we can indulge is that it would have been much worse if Potter had been there to complicate matters. Fortunately he was away in London at the time. But he is here now, and is going about chuckling to himself, and says it must have been glorious fun.

Although writing on the spur of the moment, I shall try to tell this story as clearly and calmly as possible, without offence to any of the many respectable people concerned in it, and without prejudice to myself, who suffered most of all. I confess I am still excited, and write hurriedly, but it does me good to write —I seem to feel my wrongs less, and when this appears in print I shall make a point of sending copies of it to half-a-dozen people who now pass me coldly in the street.

There is no other way in which I can clear

myself and show them that it was not my fault alone but everyone's fault and that they all acted in a stupid, insane manner. Now let me explain :

My house, as I have already mentioned, is one of a terrace of twelve, all under the care of one *concierge*, who is a pleasant, well-meaning man with a black beard, who has a wife, a baby three months old, and a dog. A few doors from me there lives a retired English colonel and his family. He and I have always been good friends until now, and he is a most estimable man. He owns an Irish terrier, an unsociable, morose creature named "Jonathan," who hates my dog, because, as I have previously related, one comes from a Roman Catholic family, and the other from a Protestant. Another neighbour is an Italian gentleman interested in the macaroni importation trade, and he and I were also on friendly terms, and stood each other drinks at the Café du Cheval Blanc. The rest of the houses are occupied by French families—mostly military people (there being two colonels and two captains), with whom my family were on fairly friendly terms, and the children would play together on the terrace with their toys and

two of the dogs—that of the *concierge* and mine.

Now, in the town there is an American grocer, who supplies the English colonel and me; the other day I went there, and he told me he had just received some fine, lightly-smoked haddocks. I bought two big ones, and asked him to send them to the Villa des Tilleuls. Just after I had left the shop a friend of mine went there. He had just arrived from England, was on his way to Paris, and knowing that I was a customer of the grocer man, asked him if he would mind sending a small parcel to my house, as he (my friend) was in a hurry to catch the Paris train. The parcel was one and a half pound of black plug tobacco, which he had wilfully smuggled on shore for me; he meant it in all kindness, but it was done without my knowledge or consent. The grocer man did not like to refuse, and tied the tobacco outside the haddocks, which were in brown paper. Then, as a precaution, he attached a memo. for "2 haddocks, 3.50f.; 1½ lb. chocolate, 4.50f."; so *that* was all right, although it was a risky and foolish thing to do. But his assistant made a mistake, and my parcel was put in a box of groceries for an English family at

Caen, where it remained a week, and was then sent back to the grocer. He immediately, although it was ten o'clock at night, sent it off to me by a stupid girl, who gave it to Berthe, and hurried away—glad to be rid of it, for it smelt very high.

Unfortunately, I was not at home when the odoriferous parcel arrived, being in Paris with the very man who was the primary cause of all that happened, and I had stupidly forgotten to tell any one in the house that I had bought the fish. We are all liable to err. Therefore when Berthe brought the ill-smelling parcel to my daughter, the latter told her to take the horrid thing away, as she was sure it was not for me, as none of us drank chocolate, but Colonel Harrison's family did, and they also liked smoked fish, though she couldn't understand how they could eat fish like *that*. Berthe hurried away, and gave the parcel to Mrs Harrison's cook, saying that the grocer had sent it to me in mistake, but that mademoiselle and madame were sure it was for *monsieur le colonel*. The cook took it to her mistress, who, after she had got over the shock the smell gave her, said it certainly was not for her, as she had ordered no fish and no

chocolate, but suggested that most likely it was intended for the French captain at No. 5, and told her to take it there early in the morning. This was done, but that officer and his wife objected strongly to receiving the parcel—they knew nothing about it, and wouldn't let her leave it; so she brought it back to Berthe, who said that no doubt it was for the Italian gentleman, and after breakfast she took it to No. 7, where the macaroni merchant lived. Finding no one about, she placed it on the doorstep, where the Italian family's *bonne* found it, and gave it to her mistress, who bade her take it to the *concierge*, as it was not for her. The *concierge* was out, but his wife said the *bonne* could leave it until he came home; half an hour later she put it in the garden, as it was now beginning to be unbearable, and made her baby cough. It stayed there till 6 p.m., when the *concierge* came home, and his wife told him the story as far as she knew it; and then Berthe and Mrs Harrison's cook happening to pass, joined in the discussion, and the three women and the man came to my house, and asked my daughter for *her* version. She, being busy at her lessons, was somewhat curt, and said that they had better take it back to the

colonel's house (meaning the French colonel), but Berthe being an idiot, and always interfering in other people's business, took it to the English colonel's house, whereupon Mrs Harrison became very angry, and sent my daughter a sharp message to the effect that her family did not eat decayed fish, nor use disgusting black tobacco. Berthe, therefore, who has a temper and a grudge against the *bonne* at the French colonel's, on account of her tampering with the affections of her (Berthe's) *fiancé*, sailed up, with Mrs Harrison's cook, to that officer's house, rang the bell, and when the *bonne* opened the door, told her to take *monsieur le colonel's* rotten fish, and dumped the squashy, sodden parcel in the hall. By this time the smell was awful.

. . . . . .

I must now stop—to explain a little further. When I say "the French colonel," I do not mean Colonel Lamartine, the handsome gunner man who is beloved of my children; but an infantry colonel, who has a Tonquin liver and bushy grey eyebrows, and an habitually "cranky" expression. One of my children says that his orderly told *her* that his master's liver was disarranged in Tonquin. Her sister,

however, affirms that he meant Madagascar, and says the orderly told *her* that there were two English bandits in Madagascar named "Willock-bee" and "Sheer-vingt-un," and if *monsieur le colonel* could have caught them, he would have hanged them. This led to quite an angry discussion on the terrace, in which Colonel Harrison's children joined with mine and the orderly. *They* said that the orderly meant Colonel Willoughby and Colonel Shervinton, who were not bandits at all, but quite *comme il faut*, and proper English officers, with whom their father had dined. They added that the only bandits in Madagascar were the French soldiers who "spiked" Hova children on their bayonets, and dragged the Queen of the Hovas in iron chains through the streets of Paris before sending her off to Siberia, etc. (When the Harrison children want to annoy French people their power of invention is something marvellous.) Well, the end of it was that the orderly went off in a benumbed state of mind, and, I suppose, told his master the English children said that he (the colonel) was a bandit or even worse; and the colonel, not knowing that my children had said nothing at all offensive to his orderly, confused them with

the Harrison children and told the orderly not to have any further speech with them. This, of course, made me cross and largely helped to create the horrible muddle that finally ensued and has caused me to feel like a criminal. Now, I can go on.

. . . . . .

When the French colonel came home he was furious, and thinking the English colonel (whom he did not know) meant to insult him, sent his orderly to him with a letter demanding an explanation. Meanwhile the *concierge* was trotting round to the other houses making inquiries, and by 8 p.m. the whole twelve families and their servants were discussing the matter. Berthe even took the tram and went to the grocer to hear *his* explanation, but the shop was closed. When she came back she met the French colonel's orderly, who told her that the English colonel had said "Damn," and declined to answer his master's letter, and that his master would send his seconds to him in the morning. Berthe's *fiancé*, who is on leave, now happened to come along, and, finding her talking to another soldier, lost his temper, and the three aroused the whole neighbourhood—the two warriors

shouting out opprobrious terms, and Berthe screaming. This excited my dog, who flew at the colonel's orderly and tore his pants, the *concierge's* mongrel joined in, and in three minutes nearly a hundred people had come to see what was wrong ; and my wife and children locked the doors and put out the lights.

When I returned home from Paris on the following day, I found things in an awful state. Of course by this time I had remembered the fish, and my friend had told me all about the tobacco ; so, hurriedly swallowing some breakfast, I set out to put matters right. I first asked to see Mrs Harrison She was "not at home" to me. Then I asked for the colonel. He also was "not at home." Then, daring much, I boldly went to Monsieur le Colonel Le Patourel, and tried, in my limited French, to explain things about those wretched fish, but he interrupted me by telling me that I kept a dangerous dog, and that it should be destroyed, "together with the other mongrel owned by the English colonel." I tried hard to express my regret, and took out a five-franc piece, meaning it for the orderly with the damaged pants, but *he* thought I was trying to square him with five francs

and nearly had a fit, so I left him, and went to the macaroni man, who speaks English; but he was as cold as the colonel was hot, and said that my servant was an insolent person, and listened with an incredulous smile to my story about forgetting all about ordering the fish. When I got home I found two *douane* officials waiting to see me about the tobacco; they took my statement down in writing, and went away telling me that I should hear from the bureau later on. We are all very depressed and miserable, and everyone—even the English colonel's dog—looks at me with suspicion, and if a policeman saunters past the house, Berthe begins to tremble, and lets the crockery drop, and the children begin to cry, thinking we shall all be immured in prison at any moment, not only on account of my being suspected of smuggling tobacco, but for having done something very wrong with bad fish, and set our dog to worry the French colonel's orderly.

That, anyway, is what the neighbours children tell them; and I am too confused to enter into further explanations.

THE END

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